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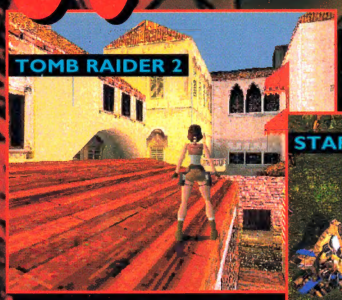

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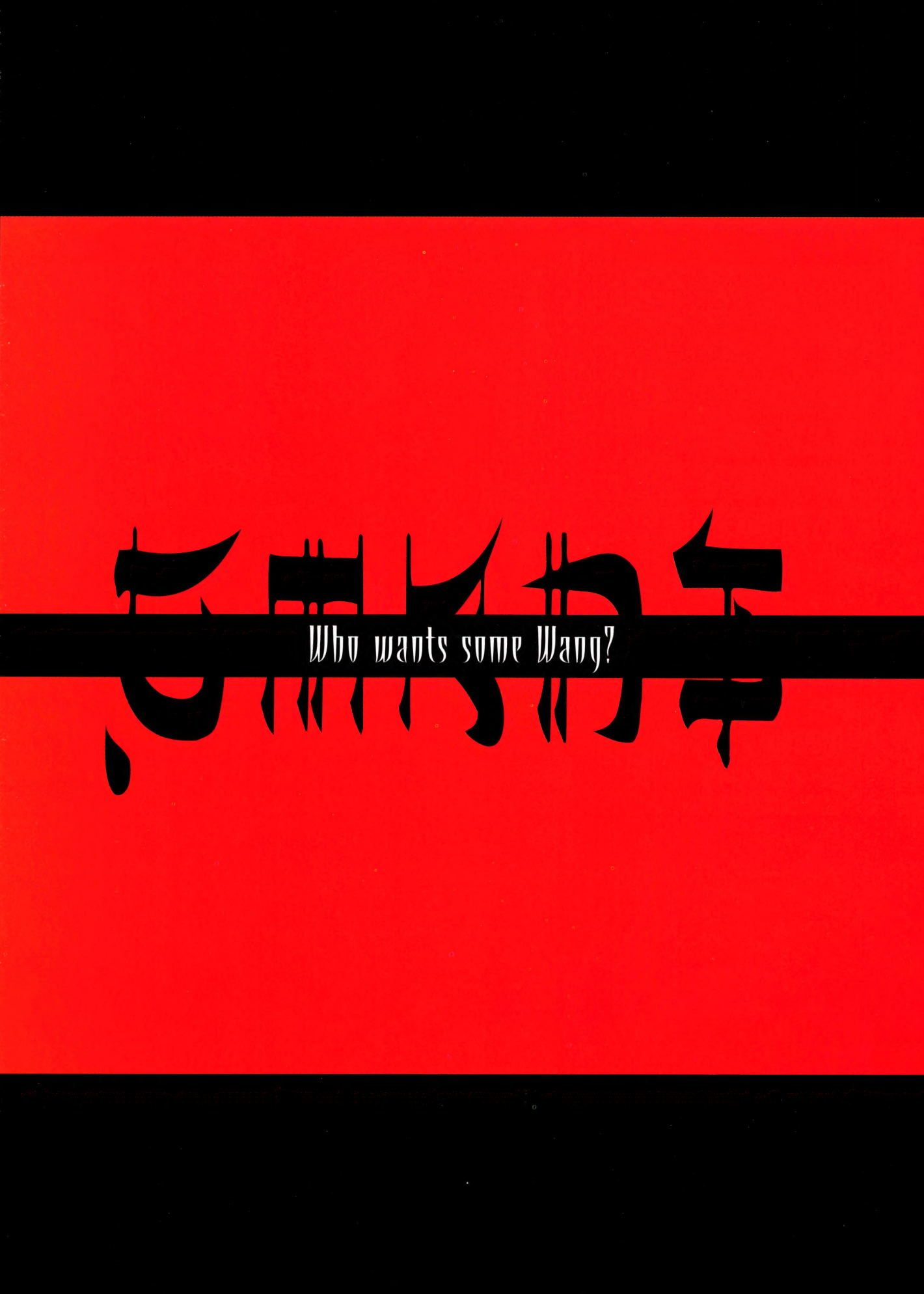
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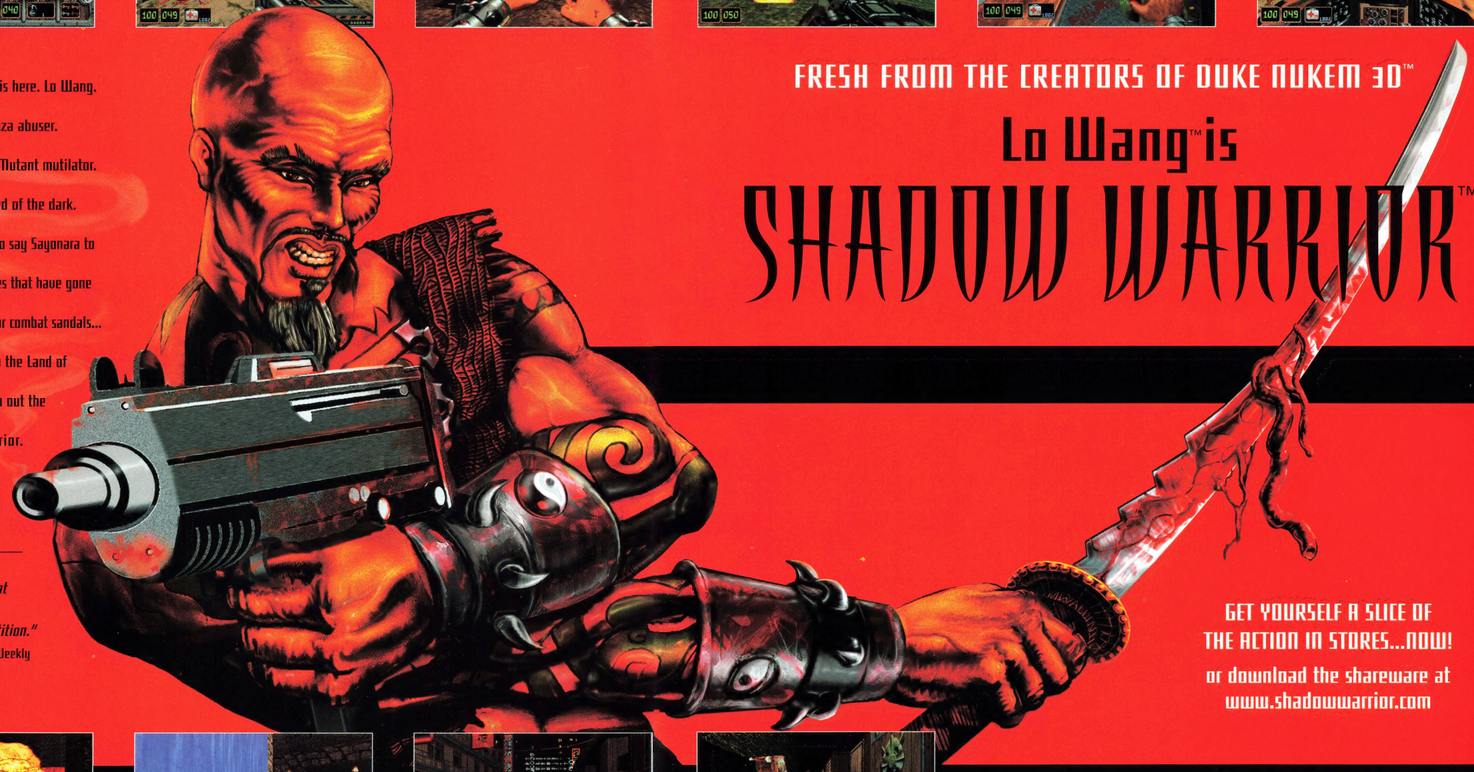

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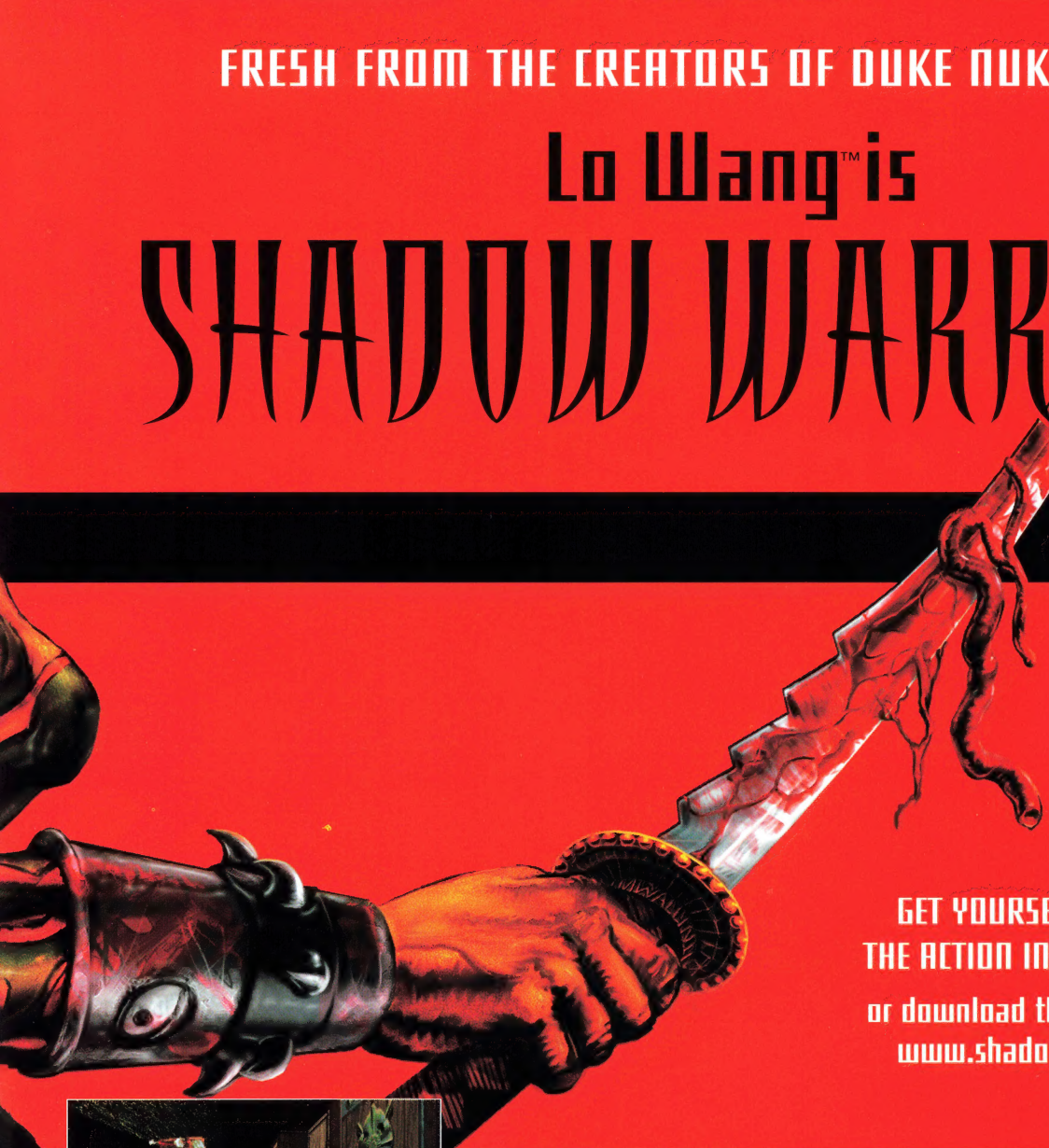

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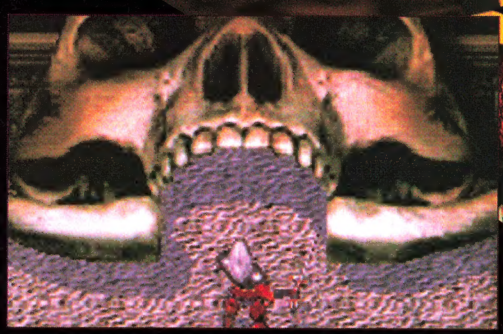

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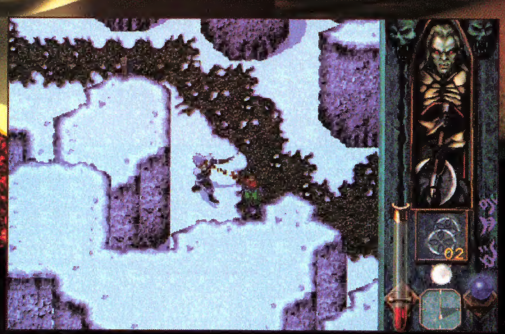

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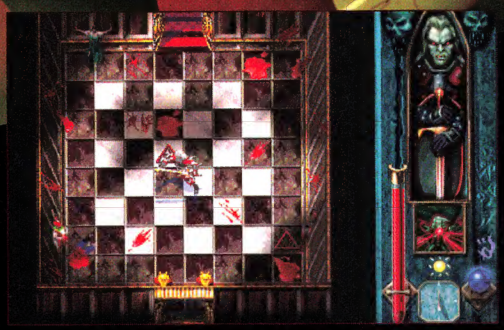

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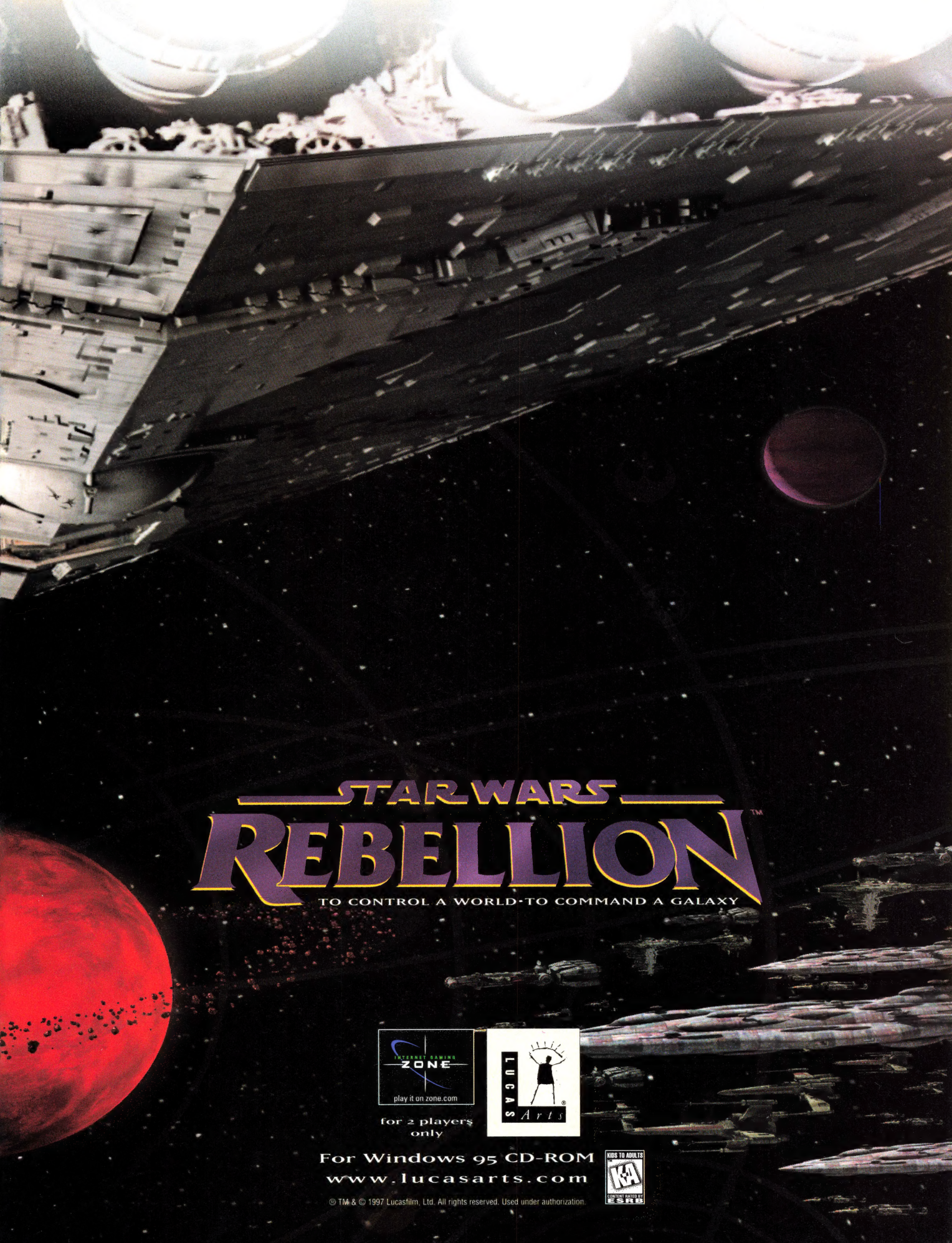
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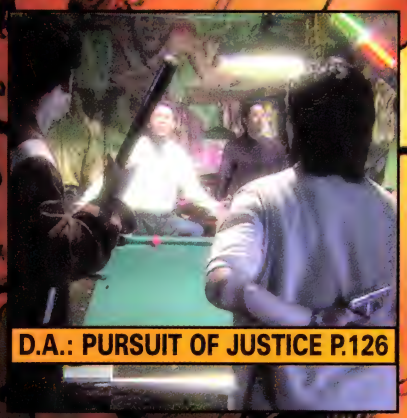

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EDITOR'S NOTE

STEVE KLETT

Brace Yourself

Ignoring the continued uncertainty surrounding the online-gaming business (see The Opponent, page 50), one theme managed to shout out above the din at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo in Atlanta—*quality*.

While there was a ton of software to see at the show, there weren't as many titles as in previous years, speaking to the general trend emerging in the game-publishing community of putting out fewer, but better-quality, titles. Indeed, GT Interactive—one of the industry's most prolific publishers—said this would be its mantra for the coming year.

There may be fewer titles on the books, but unfortunately, everyone's still targeting the September-through-November release schedule for all their A-titles, and lots of excellent games are still likely to get overlooked come Christmas. (For more on this, see The Mercenary, page 54.)

Well, that may be bad news for publishers, but it's really great news for you, the gamer. The technical quality of games has matured to a level the industry has never seen before: most have the latest SVGA graphics, dynamic lighting, amazing motion-captured animations, sophisticated 3D engines, super-realistic physics, 3D-positional sound effects, 3D hardware acceleration where appropriate, and amazing CD-quality musical scores.

Of course, this means that this holiday season, you'll be faced with some tough choices on what games to ask for, to buy for friends, or to buy for yourself. Heck, in browsing the stores, you may never get past the first-person and real-time strategy genres alone: Daikatana, Quake 2, Hexen II, Half-Life, Unreal, Starcraft, Dominion...the list goes on.

Knowing what a daunting task lies ahead of you, the *PC Games* staff went ahead and put together a list of the 25 titles we're most excited about playing this fall, culled from hundreds of games we've seen at the show, in our offices, and on the road. You'll find them, ranked in order of staff popularity, in the story beginning on page 58. We hope this helps. Check it out, then send us your own votes for games we didn't include.

Also, one of the most exciting things about the Internet is that it's becoming increasingly populated with Web sites made by gamers, dedicated to their favorite titles. See "For the Love of It," page 86, for some of our favorites.

We've worked hard to pack this issue as full as possible with useful information on the hottest games. As always, let us know what you like, don't like, and would like to see more of. In the meantime, enjoy!

Steve Klett

Steve Klett
Editor in Chief
sklett@pcgames.com

PC Games (ISSN 1089-3695), Connecting Gamers to Games, is published 10 times per year for $18.00 a year (magazine only) by PC Games Publishing, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Ste. 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; (415) 349-7100; An IDG Company: The World's Leader In Information Services On Information Technology. The PC Games name and logo are trademarks of PC Games Publishing. Periodicals postage paid at San Mateo, CA, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PC GAMES, PO. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80328-9710. Change of Address: Please send old label and new address to PC GAMES, PO. Box 59710, Boulder, CO 80328-9710. GST 131 304 347. Foreign and Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars on a U.S. bank and must include $25/year additional for shipping (air delivery).
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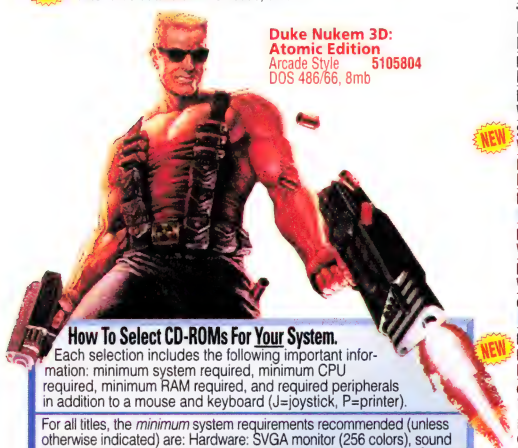

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NEW **Leisure Suit Larry: Greatest Hits And Misses** Adventure 5108907
DOS/WIN3.1/WC 386/25, 4mb

Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia '97 General Ref. 5090501
WIN3.1/WC 486/66, 8mb

Masterclips 35,000 Premium Image Collection Clip-Art Library 5084801
WIN3.1/WC 386, 4mb, P

NEW **Zork: Legacy Collection** Adventure 5114004
DOS/WC 486/66, 8mb

NEW **Mechwarrior 2: Battle Pack** Arcade Style 5108501
WIN '95 Pentium, 16mb, J

Print Artist 4.0 Home/Personal 5089305
WIN3.1/WC 486/33, 8mb, P

NEW **Retire Ready Deluxe** Home/Personal 5107107
WIN3.1/WC 486/33, 8mb

Batman & Robin Activity Center Children's Ed. 5100102
WIN3.1/WC 486 or MAC 68040, 8mb

Earthsiege 2 Arcade Style 5080700
WIN '95 486, 8mb, J

First Aid 97 Deluxe
Utilities 5098306
WIN '95 486, 8mb

Mechwarrior 2 Mercenaries
Arcade Style 5091905
DOS/WC 486/66, 8mb, J

The Oregon Trail II Children's Ed. 5078308
WIN3.1/WC 486, 8mb or MAC 68030, 5mb

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure Arcade Style 5076005
WIN '95 486/33, 8mb

Earthworm Jim Arcade Style 5075304
WIN '95 486/33, 8mb

3D Ultra Pinball: Creep Night Arcade Style 5088208
WIN3.1/WC 486/33, 8mb or MAC 68040, 12mb

Time Commando Arcade Style 5089602
DOS/WC 486/66, 8mb

Pro CD Internet Directory Internet Guide 5091103
WIN3.1/WC 386, 4mb

Java Programmer's Library Computer Tutor. 5073200
WIN '95 386, 4mb

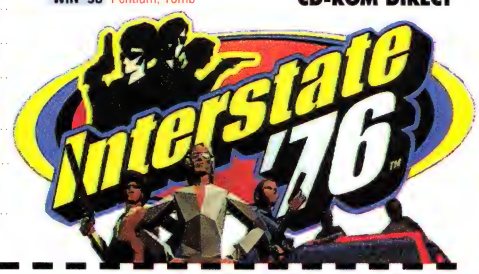
NEW **Flying Corps** Flight Sim. 5105606
DOS/WC Pent90, 16mb, J

Lords Of The Realm II Strategy Game 5102108
DOS/WC 486/66, 8mb

NEW **The Time Warp Of Dr. Brain**
Children's Ed. 5106307
WIN3.1/WC 486/66 or MAC 68040, 8mb

NEW **Interstate '76**
Arcade Style 5108600
WIN '95 Pentium, 16mb

COLUMBIA HOUSE
CD-ROM DIRECT



How To Select CD-ROMs For Your System.
Each selection includes the following important information: minimum system required, minimum CPU required, minimum RAM required, and required peripherals in addition to a mouse and keyboard (J=joystick, P=printer).

For all titles, the *minimum* system requirements recommended (unless otherwise indicated) are: Hardware: SVGA monitor (256 colors), sound card, 40mb hard drive, double speed CD-ROM drive. Operating System: DOS 5.0, Windows 3.1, Macintosh System 7.0. (WC=WIN '95 compatible.) **WIN '95** =designed for Windows '95 only. Pent.=Pentium.

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Account Number _____ Exp. Date _____ Signature _____

My main CD-ROM interest is: (check one) (Note: You are always free to choose from any category.)
☐ Entertainment ☐ Education (includes children's titles) ☐ Edutainment ☐ Productivity

Name _____ Phone (_____) _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Important! Did you remember to choose PC or Mac? Will your selections run on your system?

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PC GAMES.EXE

27 GREAT DEMOS

Complete list on page 16

Welcome to another *PC Games* CD that's brimming with the finest in gaming entertainment. We've really pulled out the stops to bring you a great collection of demos, all presented in the most simple, effective and downright easy-to-use interface around. There's something here to suit all tastes—enjoy!

Getting Started

Win 95

Simply place the CD in your disc drive and the interface will burst into life with the Autorun function.

Win 3.1

Insert the CD in your disc drive. In Program Manager, select the File menu and then Run. In the command-line box, type d:\pcgames.exe (where "d" is the letter of your disc drive).

Tech Help FAQ

Q: When I try to run the interface, I get a "Can't find VB40016.DLL" message (or some other "Can't find" error).

A: *Run the setup program. Start Button -> Run -> type in x:Setup (Where "x" is your CD-ROM drive).*

Q: When I try to run the interface, I get a "Run-time error 367."

A: *If you get any kind of Run-time error, run the COMDLG16.REG file included on the root directory of your CD-ROM. Start Button -> Run -> type in x:comdlg16.reg (where "x" is your CD-ROM drive).*

Q: During the setup routine, I keep getting "Can't Register file" errors.

A: *When you get this kind of error, you should get a dialog asking you whether you would like to Abort, Retry, or Ignore. Just select Ignore for any and all errors of this type. Don't worry: the interface will still run without a hitch.*

Q: This demo doesn't work.

A: *Read the notes accompanying each game in the description box—they will cover most possible problems. Please note that while we are happy to answer technical-support questions relating to the interface, the responsibility for the games lies with their respective publishers.*

Q: Should I re-install DirectX when prompted by a game's installation program?

A: *In general, no. Only try re-installing the latest version of DirectX if the game fails to run (particularly if you just get a blank screen after running a program).*

Q: Why haven't I got a CD-ROM with my magazine?

A: *Perhaps you bought, or have a subscription to, the non-CD version. To upgrade your subscription to include the CD, or to check if you should be receiving the CD, direct inquiries to pcgamessubs@pcgames.com.*

Q: I tried all of the above and I'm still having problems.

A: *Direct CD tech-related questions to ctou@pcgames.com.*

This is where you'll find all the games featured on this issue's CD. Click on any of them to highlight the relevant information about a game.
Get up and running on the online services in a flash. Click on any of these services to run the setup routines instantly. You'll be online and playing as quickly and easily as possible.
A quick view of the type of game highlighted from the Demos list.
Once you've selected a game from the Demos list, information about that game, installation advice (which may be pretty important, so please take a moment to read it), and some gameplay hints appear in this box.
Find out a couple of the forthcoming highlights on next issue's CD and in the magazine with a quick click here.
You really want to leave? Click here to exit from the interface.
PC Games.com is one of the most happening gaming Web sites out there. Click on this button, and you'll be prompted to locate the executable file that runs your Web browser (it's likely to be iexplore.exe or netscape.exe). Once you've done that, this information is stored so that in the future, you're just one click away from the latest news, reviews, previews, and information.
Once you've selected a demo from the list and read the information in the instruction box, you're ready to install or play. One click on this button runs the install or setup routine for your selected demo. And there you have it—straight to the games.
DEMOS
Mordor 2
NASCAR Racing 2 Tracks
Need for Speed II
Pacific General
Panzer General II
Rally Championship
Red Baron
Shadow Warrior
Terracide
Theme Hospital
Wing vs. TIE Fighter
3D Action
Online
HEAT.NET
PLAYER
Shadow Warrior
Price: N/A
3D Realms: 800-3DREALMS
Technical Support: 800-3DREALMS
System Requirements: Pentium
MS-DOS, VGA Compatible
Blaster Compatible
It's Here! Shadow Warrior is an internal 3D Realms game using many of the same team members that brought you Duke Nukem 3D as well as long time staffers Frank Maddin & Jim Norwood.
Technology: Shadow Warrior is built upon the successful Build engine, that brought you Duke
PC GAMES
PC Games Online
http://www.pcgames.com
QUICK LINK
For Instant Access
QUIT

Due to circumstances beyond our control, the Temüjin demo that was scheduled to run on this month's CD could not be included. We apologize for the inconvenience.

DEFIANCE™
Defiance "...destined to achieve noteworthy status." — Computer Game Entertainment (preview)
" . . . sharp 3D engine that looks like it could stand toe to toe with Quake™ . . . the structure and flow of gameplay is more interesting than most shooters . . ." —PC Gamer (preview)
BITE ME!
If it's battle you want, it's battle you'll get
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PC GAMES.EXE 27 GREAT DEMOS

Featuring:
- Shadow Warrior (GT Interactive)
- Extreme Assault (Blue Byte) EXCLUSIVE
- Red Baron (Sierra) FULL GAME

Also:
- Atomic Bomberman (Interplay)
- Battlecruiser 3000AD (Take 2)
- Betrayal in Antara (Sierra)
- Bust-A-Move 2 (Acclaim)
- Carmageddon (Interplay)
- Dark Colony (SSI)
- Dark Rift (Kronos)
- Digital Action (NETROM)
- Exile III: Ruined World (Spiderweb)
- Fallout (Interplay)
- Front Page Sports: Baseball '98 (Sierra)
- Imperialism (SSI)
- Incubation (movie file) (Blue Byte)
- Machine Hunter (MGM)
- Mordor II: Darkness Awakening! (VB Designs)
- NASCAR 2 Fantasy Tracks (Sierra)
- Need for Speed II (EA)
- Pacific General (SSI)
- Panzer General II (SSI)
- Rally Championship (Virgin)
- Terracide (Eidos)
- Theme Hospital (Origin)

Patches:
- Battlecruiser 3000AD
- Jack Nicklaus 4.1
- X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter 1.1

America Online:
50-hour trial

TEN
- Deadlock Shareware
- Quake Shareware
- Quake Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler

Mplayer
- Big Red Racing Enabler
- Command & Conquer Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler
- Quake Enabler

HEAT

EXCLUSIVE Extreme Assault

Check out this all-new demo of Blue Byte's helicopter action game (reviewed on page 113). We've got a completely original bunch of missions, presented with the same style, mission briefings, and action as the full version. Jump into the hot seat of the Sioux AH-23 attack copter and deal death to alien scum!

Battlecruiser 3000AD

After the trials, the wranglings, the sweat, and the tears, BC3K is finally fit to be played fully. We've included all the patches game owners need to get fully up to speed with the latest revision. Even if you own the game, the large demo offers plenty of detail and no small amount of gameplay. And because it's a randomly generated universe, the options are virtually endless. You'll finally be able to see for yourself whether the hassles and aggravation have been worthwhile.

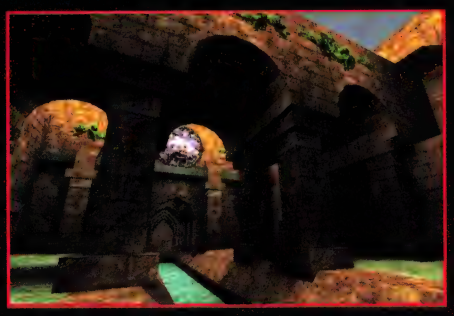
Red Baron

With the imminent release of Red Baron 2, Sierra has released the original version of this WWI flight sim in its full, unedited glory. Despite its age, Red Baron comes off as one of the best sims in its genre. It'll whet your appetite for the sequel.

Shadow Warrior

Heard of this game? Here's the latest version, just waiting to be fired up. It's your chance to carve 'em up and go ninja!

REAL



Your ship has crash landed on an unknown planet.

Look around. Crystal clear water shimmers. Shadows shift. Alien architecture fades into the horizon. Darkness falls. Walkways glow. Godless temples beckon. You are afraid. You are in the real world...but it is like no world you have ever known. You are an uninvited guest in the fastest, sleekest, most beautiful 3D world ever created. Live it. Breathe it. Survive it.

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WINDOWS 95 CD-ROM

Digital Extremes

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Maximized for MMX™ Technology

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GT Interactive Software
unreal.gtgames.com

LOOK FOR THE NOVEL FROM POCKET BOOKS

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PCGAMES.COM

Battlezone, Reviews, Previews, News, Demo, Chat, Quake—it's all at **www.pcgames.com.**

While the Electronic Entertainment Expo is but a distant memory for most attendees, *PC Games*' buzzin' E3live.com Web site, presented by GT Interactive, is still up and running and full of tons of information on all the great gaming titles heading your way this year and into next.

All those images and previews of forthcoming titles have been collated into a tremendous collection of gaming information. But it doesn't just sit still—oh, no. E3live.com is at the cutting edge of the technology curve with RealVideo footage of games, interviews with designers and developers, and other associated fluff to highlight the fun, frolics, and sheer enthusiasm that everyone has for their product.

If you want to know the lengths to which some prominent companies went to impress the industry, check out the Virtual Booths, where GT Interactive, Microsoft, SegaSoft, and SSI have many of their games on display. It's all at E3live.com.

Beware The Sniper

How much do most of the *PC Games* editorial staff hate snipers? Plenty. Even more so since they discovered they work with one. Snipe loves shaking up the one-dimensional thinking and gameplay styles of his less-enlightened coworkers, and now he's going to share some of his dark art with the rest of you in his own Battlezone column.

Starting in August, keep a keen eye out for Snipe's guerrilla perspective in The Sniper. Unless his coworkers, or other fascist minions of orthodoxy, strike a blow for repression, Snipe will update you regularly on the latest from the front lines—as seen from the rafters, of course. So watch out for The Sniper, and remember, there's no right or wrong way to play a first-person shooter, for there's no honor in war. But planting a rocket in your enemy's back... now *that's* a wonderful experience.

QuakeCon

Some of the world's best Quake players showed up at this year's QuakeCon, held in Plano, Texas, on July 16–20. Attendees came from as far away as Europe, Asia, and Australia to take part in one of the biggest Quake Tournaments ever. With so many people present, sponsors were quick to join in, showing new products and demoing new games. Alongside id Software, Ion Storm, Ritual Entertainment (formerly Hipnotic Interactive), and other gaming companies was ADV Films, a large anime publisher.

The *PC Games* Web crew was there and didn't miss a single rocket. Armed with a digital camera and video camera, they covered the action firsthand, bringing screenshots, video footage, and interviews from the event to every Web browser in the country. Missed out? Couldn't make it to Texas in time? Wondering about the winners and losers, and what the prizes were? Well, you can still see all the footage on our site, **www.pcgames.com/quakecon**, or check out the Official QuakeCon Web site, **www.quakecon.com**.

PC GAMES.COM

Daikatana

John Romero's red-hot first-person action game is the focus of our cover feature. But be sure to hit PC Games.com for our expanded, Web-only coverage of the game.

Redline

We've been closely tracking the progress of this graphically groundbreaking action game for months now, giving you the inside scoop on the process of game development. Get more of our behind-the-scenes look at the making of a PC game, at PC Games.com.

The French Are Coming

There's always something a little different about the way French development houses go about their business. Cryo Interactive is the Paris-based studio that brought Dune to the PC, as well as The Raven Project, Angel Devoid, and the original Dragon Lore. Its latest releases, Atlantis and Dragon Lore II, are both reviewed in this issue, but the company has even more interesting products down the line. Check out the further adventures of Cryo as they prepare Dreams, Intervention, Ubik, and Third Millennium as the spearhead of a concerted effort to break the American market.

Exclusive Reviews

PC Games.com has a whole bunch of reviews that you won't find in the magazine. Topping the list this month is an update of the Battlecruiser 3000AD saga. We brought you a fully informed review of this troubled title back in February 1997, when it had the distinction of scoring a big fat F. Well, things have moved on, and anyone following the tale will have noted how the various fixes, patches, and updates have turned this unplayable mess into the complex sci-fi action and strategy game that it set out to be. So, in fairness to all involved, we've taken another look at it. Turn to BC3K, part two, only on PC Games.com.

Other Web-only reviews this month include Star Warped, the Star Wars parody from Parroty Interactive (who brought you Pyst); X-Men: Children of the Atom, the port of the popular arcade game; Soldier Boyz, an FMV shooter starring Michael Dudikoff; the surfing game Wild Ride; and more. For the lowdown on these and other new games, you know where to go: **www.pcgames.com**.

Enthusiast Web Sites

All those great gamer-created Web sites covered in this month's feature are linked from PC Games.com. We've even thrown in a few more, to show you the full extent of the talent producing valuable resources for fellow gamers.

INCOMING!

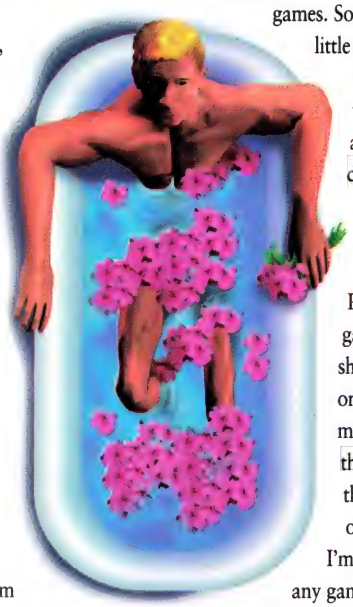
Question of the Month: Ready to Invest?

One look at this month's "Games of Autumn" feature, and it's obvious that the latest batch of upcoming games is going to need one beefed-up system—even more than usual. We're talking 3D card, P166 minimum...Our question is, is it worthwhile? Are you excited enough about the games to spend the dosh? Let us know. As always, one letter-writer will receive an original *PC Games* T-shirt and a free game. Send mail to Letters to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; or email: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Gore Gone Bad

I just read The Player's "All Blood, No Guts" column (July/August), and I have to agree with you. It seems that the trend in games is following the long-running trend in movies these days: all action, blood, guts, and no story. It's unfortunate that game designers seem to think that we all want these kinds of crappy games. All I can say is, thank god for Ultima Online. I can't wait!

Skeletonjack
Via email



I thought The Player was right on in his latest column: Many games have way too much violence. Game producers seem to think that if they put in violence and OK graphics, that will compensate for crappy gameplay and monsters dumber than my dog. I'm only 12 years old, and I am too young for some teen games like Diablo (yes, I am ashamed) but way too old for games made for younger kids, like Winnie the Pooh's Animated Storybook (no offense, Winnie). The only games that don't have tons of violence and that are still fun to play are sports games, some wargames, and puzzle games. Don't get me wrong: Some games need some violence in them, but most go over the limit. I like how C&C and Warcraft have some violence, but not enough to distract you from play.

Braden Medders
Thomasville, Georgia

I totally agree with your take on the PC game industry. I'm a senior designer with Raven Software, and even though this is a personal opinion, it's held by a lot of the people in the office: Excessive gore is only there for the quick sell.

Not all companies are making games just for the money: I do it because I love it. We try to stress environment, and we don't throw in any lewd or excessively gory things. We try to make solid games. Some of our stuff may get a little bloody, but not to excess. In the end, it's solid gameplay that makes a game a classic, and excessive gore will never compensate for crappy design.

Eric Biessman
Via email

Personally, I LOVE violent games. I love a game where I shoot off body parts one by one. The companies who are making these games are making them for consumers like me—the ones they make money off of. But that's not the point. I'm the consumer, and I can buy any game or product I see fit. Parents who complain about "bloody" games, shut up! If you don't want your kids to play, then don't buy it for them!

Richard Brito
Via email

Ultima Good!

I'm writing to compliment your staff on the excellent Ultima Online article and interview (July/August), and to give kudos to whoever convinced Origin to release the full version of Ultima IV to your mag.

Ultima IV is a great game, and if anyone around your office is playing it, or you want to pass on some more cool freeware to your readers, please try out the Enhanced Graphics Pack I've created for the game. I've redrawn all the tiles, fonts, cut scenes, and other graphics, and they look incredible. Only the "Initiate New Game" sequence is incomplete, but I'm working on it! I've received hundreds of positive comments so far. The Zip file, approximately 75K, is available at **http://udel.edu/~avatar/u4graph.html.**

Joshua Steele
Via email

Harleys vs. Tricycles?

To the relief of our overworked email server and postal carriers everywhere, the letters are finally starting to dwindle in response to May/June's Question of the Month ("The PC/Console Debate"). This one got you riled! Many of you gave the consoles a serious thrashing, criticizing them for inferior multiplay, poor game diversity, unexpandable games, and the absence of nongaming applications. (One reader even pointed out the availability of console-game emulators on the Web that eliminate the need for console units themselves!) Consoles, however, did have some friends, who pointed to the N64's low price, amazing graphics, lack of bugs, and ease of use. Most interesting, perhaps, was the number of people who admitted that there's room for both—that their respective strengths make each a great gaming system.

Our prize-winning letter, for its sheer quotability, was from longtime reader Kyle Hall. In Kyle's eyes: "Anyone foolish enough to think a console system could even be compared to a high-end PC would have to be truly messed in the head. Comparing PCs to consoles is like comparing Harleys to tricycles—maybe unicycles. Shadows of the Empire for the PC [should] make the Nintendo 64 look like a glorified GameBoy." *A bit harsh, certainly, but hey—devotion will do that to you.*

Its time to see what the critics and gamers are all talking about.

Realms of the Haunting™

THE BATTLEGROUND BETWEEN ULTIMATE GOOD AND EVIL

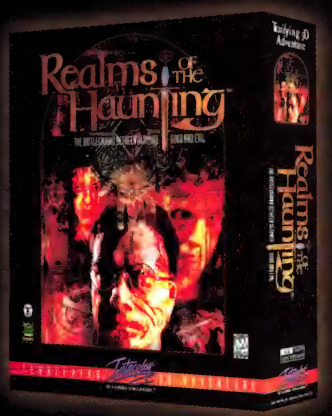
5 out of 5 stars ***Computer Life*** May 1997 "...offers one of the most fluid, absorbing fantasy-horror game experiences available."

4½ out of 5 stars *CGW* May 1997. "ROTH covers all the bases."

4 out of 5 stars ***Computer Games Strategy Plus*** May 1997 Stamp of Approval

4.5 rating out of 5 ***Game Pro*** April 1997. "You'll have a fine time playing in this Realm."

...over 50 hours of riveting gameplay..
Ultra Game Players
April 1997



Compatible Windows 95

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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Ultima Bad?

I would like to know why so many people are interested in Ultima Online. It's expensive, the graphics are cluttered, and it has a plain plotline (if there actually is one). With other games just as good as UO, such as Meridian 59 and countless free MUDs, I don't see what is so unique and exciting about it.

First, there's the price. UO will cost around $69 in Canadian money. With that, there will be a monthly fee most likely in the range of $5 to $10. Also, you must have a SLIP/PPP connection to the Internet, which is about $20 a month. That works out to about $100 for the initial fees, then about $30 a month. If Origin is expecting a profit, I don't think they will make much, due to the fact that the game is so expensive. M59 is only about $30 for the game, and about $6 a month. It features just as much gameplay as UO and costs about three times less. A big advantage MUDs have over UO is that 99 percent of them are free.

Secondly, the graphics. UO's graphics are too cluttered, and they look like they're from Blind Justice. Even the *text* looks the same. Dark Sun Online has better graphics, and they're less cluttered than UO's. M59's graphics may not be as sophisticated, but at least they're clean, which reduces lag. MUDs don't have graphics, but if you have the right terminal/mud client, they can be customized to have hotkeys, buttons, triggers, and even neat colors.

And UO's gameplay is one big disappointment. All the plotline is, as quoted from your magazine, July/August issue, page 54: "The evil wizard Mondain, and shattering the Gem of Immortality." After that, you just walk around and do stuff. Although there are stock markets, royalty, and others, you just can't compare the game to M59 and MUDs.

MUDs have cool poses, and emotes, which you can do anything with. You can also join guilds and gain power. In M59 and MUDs, there are guild quests, thousands of dungeons, countless skills, monsties, and others. There isn't as much interactivity in UO as I expected.

I hope this letter will slap UO fanatics to their senses. This game is a big disappointment, and I wouldn't be surprised if it's abandoned in the next few months.

Mike Lau
Via email

So when, exactly, were you playing UO? The second-phase beta is still probably up and running as you read this. Remember, that's beta software—i.e., it's not finished. The graphics are far superior to M59's, and won't cause increased lag, since the artwork is contained on the CD, rather than constantly downloaded. The text supplies a clear indication of who is saying what. And as for interactivity, have you seen the Guilds list? It's huge. The essence of UO is in the world-building that you, the player, achieve. You can do what you want, but there are quests, unique items, and intrigue—all generated by the actions of the players.

The cost question still has to be finalized, so don't believe anything until Origin makes an official announcement. But from the game detail that we've had the privilege of seeing, it's going to be worth every penny. Check it out when it's done and base your judgments on the final product rather than on possibilities and potentials that are, as yet, unconfirmed. —Ed.

X-Wing Rocks!

I must agree with your X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter review (July/August). This is the best space-fighter sim ever—way better than its predecessors. In X-Wing or TIE Fighter, whenever you attacked a Capital Class ship, it immediately turned all of its attention—and guns—on you. In X-Wing vs. TIE, it's different. I was strafing an Interdictor cruiser and it was hardly firing at me at all. There was one point when it turned its attention to me, but as I pulled out, it just barely acknowledged my existence, and I was able to destroy it. It's programming qualities like these that show how realistic the game is: People are supposed to be running the ship and, as we all know, people make mistakes. This is a definite improvement.

Trevor McManus
Via email

Western Justice?

I'm part of a multiplayer Outlaws posse (located at **www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Alley/7318/**), and I must say I was offended when you gave Outlaws a B in your July/August issue.

You rated the game's graphics as "C+" and kept comparing it to Duke Nukem. For one thing, Outlaws is very different from Duke Nukem and games of that nature. Its graphics just give you a Western feeling, which they should, since it's a Western kind of game. And the sound, which you rated poorly as well, is excellent, from the taunts of the level bosses to the twangy Western music.

As for putting down the game's weapons, well, it's set in the Old West. It's not like they had semi-automatics back in 18-whatever. At least Outlaws has a new storyline, unlike the blood-and-gore games such as Blood and Doom where there's no point except killing.

J.D. Catlin
Via email

We compared Outlaws to Duke Nukem because they're based on the same Build engine. And there's no doubt that Outlaws' graphics aren't the greatest. What's a "Western" feeling: average texturing, minimal environmental detail? But Outlaws is a different game from Duke—it has more stealth, more strategy, and more thought-provoking action, all of which was duly noted in the review. But while multiplayer Outlaws is certainly worthwhile, does it really compare to Duke and Quake in the fun factor? We'd say no. So a B is a solid grade representing the game's finer points, and also some of its weaker ones. —Ed.

Gaming: A Man's World?

I enjoyed the new Mercenary column ("It's a Man's World," July/August), but I don't think games are designed specifically for men or women. I am a 32-year-old female college graduate, and I want quality! Quality games transcend whether the main character is male or female. Quake is my No. 1 favorite! I dislike killing the animals in Tomb Raider much more than the slave women in Duke Nukem.

The issue seems to be more about the perceived differences between men's and women's gaming tastes. There are none! We all want to have fun and relieve stress after finals or a tough day at work. What better way than to blow away some alien scum?

No, Barbie will not do for this woman, or for any women, I suspect. Women love games as much as men, and we all want to play a great game like Quake or MechWarrior 2. Gender shouldn't be an issue in computer games.

Heather Walton
Via email

Whoops

The Web address listed for Canopus in our July/August issue was wrong. The company's site is actually located at **www.canopuscorp.com**.

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So What's Up With Bullfrog?

Dungeon Keeper: well worth the wait.

In the UK, a game released by Bullfrog goes straight to No. 1 in the charts. Theme Hospital has just done it, and there's no doubting that Dungeon Keeper will achieve the same feat. A history of quality releases like Populous, Magic Carpet, and Theme Park (massively underrated on this side of the Atlantic) has seen the company profile blossom under the keen eye of Peter Molyneux.

Magic Carpet was one of the first reasons to buy a Pentium.

However, after Electronic Arts' acquisition of Bullfrog several years ago for a price reputedly in the range of $25 to $40 million, it seemed that being an affiliate to one of the largest game publishers in the world was something that didn't suit the small company, almost-family spirit at Bullfrog.

Hi-Octane was the first release to cause suspicion that the Bullfrog crown was tarnished. With Gene Wars and the much-anticipated Dungeon Keeper missing their release dates, supposed pressure from EA to get products on the shelves resulted in a rush-job game that dented Bullfrog's reputation. Gene Wars also turned out to be underwhelming, and the Dungeon Keeper release schedule slipped still further. Industry speculation and rumor turned into reality when it was announced that Molyneux was leaving after the completion of Dungeon Keeper. So what happens to Bullfrog now without its leading light?

"We've had over a year to get over Peter leaving and look forward to what Bullfrog will do in the future," comments Alan Wright, project leader on Populous: The Third Coming and the man touted as the new star game guru in the Bullfrog ranks. So, is the remaining Bullfrog team—now standing at more than 100 people (despite the departure of the team working on the aborted underwater action game Creation, to form Mucky Foot productions)—insulted that the game community could ask "Is there life at Bullfrog after Molyneux?"

"Peter was the key influence in all that Bullfrog achieved, but we have an incredibly talented staff still here, all working on the next Bullfrog games," Wright says.

And what are those games? The first, scheduled for release around the middle of next year, is Void Star. Project leader Richard Reed describes it as "slotting between X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter and tactical wargaming. You won't actually be a fighter

continued on page 33

COVERT OPS

Sin City

Texas continues to be the hotbed of first-person action games, with yet another good-looking game based on id's Unified Quake Engine due out from Ritual Entertainment and Activision early next year. This one's called Sin, and it takes place in an anarchic future where you explore the chaos in a crime-torn 21st century as the leader of an elite strike force. With the boys at Ritual behind it, it has enormous potential to deliver a good time. If you're not familiar with Ritual, formerly known as Hipnotic Interactive, it's responsible for the superb Quake add-on pack Scourge of Armagon. And some of its employees—Jim Dose' and Richard "Levelord" Gray, for example—worked on Duke Nukem 3D at 3D Realms. Thus, as with Scourge, you can expect to see many Duke-style touches cropping up in Sin—interactive and realistic environments, defined characters and story, cool effects like destructive walls and bullet holes, and clever traps that require you to manipulate the environment around you. To top it off, Sin will have six distinct game environments, rather than the typical four. Look for exclusive coverage soon in *PC Games*.

A nice snipe spot in one of Sin's realistic levels.

Pray for Prey

The blokes at 3D Realms have offered a very early glimpse of Prey, even though you'll have to wait until the very end of next year before seeing anything on this next first-person action game from the company that created Duke Nukem 3D. An early demo tweaked interest by highlighting some amazing graphics, but more importantly, by introducing design and gameplay elements that could revolutionize the current thinking about level design for

3D Realms is only just now starting level design on Prey.

At the Wire

Intergraph's Voodoo Power-Up

Leading the pack of new 3D accelerators based on 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset is Intergraph's Intense 3D Voodoo. Like the Stingray board from Hercules, the Intense 3D Voodoo is an all-in-one card that pumps out both 2D and 3D video signals. Intergraph's card should street near $200 and come with a game bundle that includes Moto Racer and Longbow Gold. Intergraph continues to expand its consumer products division and plans to offer high-end Pentium II systems soon for direct sale to consumers at reasonable prices. As for the company's continued support of Rendition's next-generation 2200 Vérité 3D graphics chipset, Intergraph insiders say the groundwork has been laid, but a decision has yet to be made.

Playing Quake does pay.

Thresh Hijacks Carmack's Ferrari

Legends Clan member Dennis Fong, otherwise known as Thresh, drove off with John Carmack's 1987 Ferrari 328 and a TD-20 P200 PC after coming out on top of a 2,000-plus–contestant Quake tourney. Fong was one of 16 finalists who competed at the 1997 E3. Second place was won by Elvin Kimzey (Entropy9), who went home with an Intergraph TD-20 and $5,000. Patrick Li (B2) won an Intergraph system and $2,000. The tourney was sponsored by Intergraph, id, Rendition, and Mplayer.

Will playing Ultima Online pan out?

Expander to Hit Online

New research by DFC Intelligence suggests that online gaming will grow significantly after 1999. The research firm estimates that the online-game market will rake in $162 million this year, but that amount could grow to at least $1.26 billion, and possibly as high as $2.5 billion, in 2001. DFC says most of that growth will occur after 1999, when gamers start becoming convinced that online titles are good enough to pay money for. Until then, the study predicts millions of dollars will be lost by online providers, many of whom will go out of business. In comparison, IDC/Link predicts a larger online business taking shape, with online entertainment revenue hitting $12.9 billion in 2001, based on a projected 41.2 million US households with online access. Like DFC, IDC/Link predicts online games will become a significant revenue producer after 1999.

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this genre. Escher-esque rooms and portal technology allowing entry to any room on a level from any point in that level are going to cause much head-scratching and deliberation in deepest Texas. The problem is how to use this technology in a gameplay environment. In addressing this, some totally unique concepts may well be unearthed.

Make Way for Payne

The Prey team is already lending a little help and cross-project support to Finnish development house Remedy Entertainment, which is using a gritty comic book format to introduce the action game Max Payne. It's all about fast-paced action on the dark, imposing streets of New York, as Max, a fugitive undercover cop, tracks down the killers of his family and those who framed him for the murder of his boss. A technology engine giving characters a realistic bone structure ensures a detailed level of movement and reaction to the action-packed events. Superb artwork in comic-book format will replace the usual cut scenes to continue the detailed story.

Hull Down With Voodoo

With Seattle-based Zombie adding its new Spearhead game to the list, the M1A2 Abrams may turn out to be the most recognizable main battle tank ever known. I-Magic already released its M1A2 game a few months back, and NovaLogic's Armored Fist 2 covers the same territory, as does MicroProse's awesome-looking M1A2 Tank Platoon II. Zombie says its game falls somewhere in between—more realistic than Armored Fist, more fun than M1A2. Expect 50 single-player and 20 multiplayer missions, with up to 18 players supported via LAN or Internet. Those 18 people can divide up into cooperative groups or fight together as a unit against 36 computerized adversaries. Spearhead will be released by Christmas, with accelerator support for 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset, and possibly Rendition's. But Direct3D is not in the cards.

You should see the Voodoo-accelerated version of Spearhead.

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GAME BYTES

Maxtor Maxes Out

7GB of space?! That's crazy! Who needs that much? Maxtor Corporation has introduced its new DiamondMax 1750 hard drive, with an eye-popping capacity of 7GB of space. Maxtor says the HDD line was designed for consumers requiring high capacity and maximum performance in desktop systems. But we know they really mean gamers. Estimated street price is a very economical $499.

Jane's Gets the Stick

Need a joystick to match the realistic feel of Jane's ATF sim? Electronic Arts and CH Products have fallen into attack formation with a $129.95 bundle including the game and Jane's Combat Stick, last seen pulling duty as CH's F-16 joystick. Advanced Tactical Fighters features such cutting-edge aircraft as the F-22, F-117A Nighthawk, B-2A Spirit, X-29, X-31 EFM, Rafale C, and X-32 ASTOVL.

Engage Gets Clawed

Engage continues to grab exclusive online rights to new games with a deal securing the as-yet-unreleased Claw from Monolith, developer of Blood. Engage will offer exclusive levels unavailable in the title's retail version. Claw will support up to 64 players and will allow gamers to cast curses on opponents to obstruct their gameplay.

AT THE WIRE continued from page 31

D3D On the Ropes?

The high-stakes battle being waged over the future of 3D programming is heating up. Earlier this year, a number of game developers began publicly criticizing Microsoft's Direct3D 3.0, advocating a switch to SGI's OpenGL. In June, 56 rebellious developers, including Ion Storm's John Romero and LucasArts' Lawrence Holland, signed an open letter to Microsoft, demanding support for OpenGL, especially after the arrival of CosmoGL, a streamlined and more affordable subset of Open GL. Microsoft countered by releasing Direct3D 5.0, completely skipping version 4.0. While the new version includes a number of enhancements and features designed to make writing 3D games quicker and more efficient, the developer community remains frustrated with the API. Graphics-hardware companies recently announcing support for OpenGL are ATI (for its Rage 3D cards), Rendition, Number Nine, and 3Dfx.

D3D is driving developers to distraction.

3D Audio Rages

Diamond's Monster Sound 3D-audio card is getting rave reviews, and so is the board's A3D chipset parent, Aureal. In addition to Diamond, Aureal has signed licensing agreements with Cirrus Logic, ATI, and S3. Cirrus Logic is adding the A3D sound technology to its new SoundFusion accelerator; ATI and S3 have yet to announce A3D-based boards. Aureal's A3D delivers true three-dimensional sound separation.

Cirrus Logic, ATI, and S3 are joining Diamond in releasing 3D-audio cards.

Gremlin and Sega Join PowerVR Clan

NEC and VideoLogic have signed on both Sega Entertainment and Gremlin to support their 3D accelerator technology, PowerVR. Sega has enhanced Virtual On: CyberTroopers to work with the new PowerVR PCX2 chipset used in VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3Dx and Apocalypse 5D accelerator boards. For its part, Gremlin is enhancing its next 12 titles to work with PCX2 through 1998. Gremlin will also rework its existing PC catalog—including Reloaded and Realms of the Haunting—to be PowerVR-ready.

Sega's Virtual On will be PowerVR-enhanced.

Rendition Spawns New Verite

The folks at Rendition might have the 2200, their next-generation Vérité accelerator chipset, ready to go by the time you read this. Although Rendition is not revealing which video-card vendors have agreed to build accelerators using the chipset, insiders at the company say preproduction boards are benching 20 percent faster

Quake Designer Jumps Ship

The talent drain at id continues with level designer Sandy Petersen being enticed away by Dallas-based Ensemble. Petersen had been working on Quake 2, but will now be working on the final stages of Age of Empires and Ensemble's next project, a real-time magical strategy game yet to be named. According to sources within Ensemble, partner Bruce Shelley worked together with Petersen several years ago at MicroProse.

Quake 2 level designer Sandy Petersen has jumped from id to Ensemble.

than the series 1000 chipset used in Vérité boards on the market today. The 2200 is also slated to use a more conventional 2D technology to make it easier to implement by OEM vendors. And hopefully, faster SVGA and 3D video performance will also be balanced in the 2200 to take advantage of faster processors such as the Pentium II.

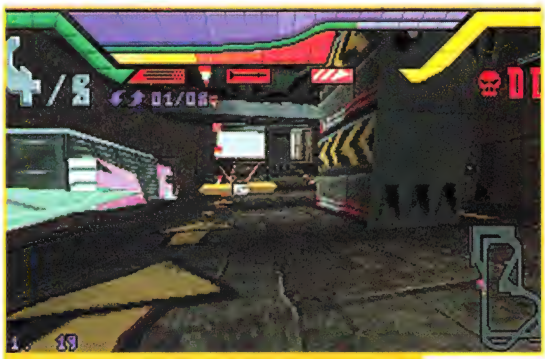
—George T. Chronis and J.V. Bolkan

Microsoft Baseball will be Vérité-ready.

Bullfrog

continued from page 30

pilot or a galactic empire commander; you'll be moving fleets of 50 ships and getting involved in all areas of the conflicts. It's also designed from the ground up as a multiplayer game, with the aim to support up to 32 players." Whether it will be server-based, modeled on Blizzard's Battle.net, or structured some other way has yet to be decided. However, Bullfrog plans support for 3D accelerators.



The underwhelming Hi-Octane proved that not every Bullfrog game was great.

Glenn Corpes, the company's head of R&D, had an interesting revelation regarding another future Bullfrog title. Does the name Indestructibles ring any bells? This twice-started, twice-canceled project is back in the hopper for a third attempt, but starting from scratch. "It's still going to be a superhero game, but less strategy-based than many of these group games. It's all about going into cities and destroying them," Corpes says. Don't expect to see anything on it until at least Christmas of 1998, but the game is going to have a Magic Carpet–style look and feel and could use either a first- or third-person interface. Typical superhero actions like picking up cars and trains and throwing them around for fun are a strong possibility.

The third Populous game is coming soon.

The same team that worked on Theme Hospital is taking on a third project that, according to project leader Gary Carr, "is so simple when we came up with it, we couldn't believe that no one else had done it." As a result of the excitement over the basic concept, they were reluctant to let us in on the secret—damn. "It will have a more global appeal than Hospital, though," confirms Carr.

Although the Bullfrog name is very well known in the UK, the humor and style of Bullfrog games are often lost in other markets, most notably in the US. "That's something that we certainly want to work on," Wright says. "England is great, but we fully appreciate the importance of the US market and are targeting our designs to be universal—as evidenced by the multiplayer side of these coming projects."

—Rob Smith

THE GREAT CATACLYSM HAS LEFT THE EARTH IN CHAOS.

GAME BYTES

Diamond Does DVD

High-quality digital playback, Dolby Digital Surround Sound, and TV-out capability highlight Diamond's new Maximum DVD Kit. The upgrade pack uses Toshiba's DVD-ROM drive mechanism, Diamond's PCI-based DVD adapter with state-of-the-art MPEG-2 video and Dolby Digital audio, and a software bundle of full-version DVD-based entertainment titles, including Silent Steel and Wing Commander IV. The TV-out support gives consumers the opportunity to watch DVD and MPEG-2 movies on their TVs as well as on their PCs. In addition, the kit will include user-friendly navigational software, which will provide easy onscreen access to playback controls.

Battle.net Clocks 13 Million

Ever check out Battle.net? If you haven't, maybe you should. The Diablo community has grown to 700,000 players who have logged 13 million games played on Battle.net since the game's January release. According to PC Data, Diablo was the No. 1–selling game for the first four months of the year—selling over 750,000 copies worldwide—until it was knocked to second by X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter in May. *—Amy Crigger*

Spielberg's dinos are heading for Engage.

Engage Swallows T-Rex

Who says movie-to-game spin-offs are a thing of the past? Concurrent with DreamWorks' three games in development based on *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*—Trespasser, Chaos Island, and the console-based The Lost World: Jurassic Park—Engage has just finalized a deal with Universal Pictures to secure the exclusive rights to develop an online game based on the movie. This original game will follow the storyline of the film closely and will be the only PC-based *Lost World* online game available. Engage says no separate retail version is planned.

Wild Bill Wants to Talk

While some WarBirds fans might find being verbally accosted by Interactive Magic's Wild Bill Stealey as damaging as his machine-gun fire during an online match, Stealey is determined to bring Internet voice communications to online gaming. I-Magic is now fine-tuning its MEGAvoice technology, meant to do just that. Designed to operate within the limited bandwidth provided by modems and phone lines, the technology is slated to be added soon to all of I-Magic's existing and future games. Players will then be able to speak to each other rather than typing messages with their keyboards. The company has yet to say whether it will offer a free patch for owners of existing games.

I-Magic has a new Internet voice technology.

Diablo Invades the World

Determined to reach online gamers beyond North America, Blizzard is expanding the reach of Battle.net to Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan. The gamemaker is partnering with local ISPs in these countries to secure enough high-speed connections to make Battle.net games playable for all combatants. In addition, Blizzard will update its software later this year to make a worldwide ranking system possible. Battle.net has hosted 13 million games since its launch in January.

Battle.net is moving offshore.

WorldPlay games such as Trophy Bass and MissionForce: CyberStorm are coming to EarthLink's Arena.

WorldPlay Joins EarthLink Clan

EarthLink is trying hard to make its Arena (**www.thearena.com**) site a launching pad for online gaming. The latest addition to Arena is WorldPlay, the service formerly known as the ImagiNation Network. EarthLink subscribers will now have easy access to such Sierra-sourced WorldPlay online games as MissionForce: CyberStorm, Trophy Bass 2, Baldies, and the Front Page Sports series.

Concentric Chases Online Power-Up

Directly competing with EarthLink's Arena site is Game Gateway (**www.gamegateway.com**), a new joint venture between Concentric and Unified Gamers Online. Designed as a one-stop launch point to various online services and their stables of games, Game Gateway hopes to entice gamers who play on multiple services by offering them one account and one bill. Game Gateway has already partnered with Engage, Kesmai, MPG-Net, Infogames, and On-Line PLC. TEN and I-Magic are also expected to link with Game Gateway. Concentric says pricing should average $1.75 per hour of gameplay, after a new subscriber's $35 of free game time is used up. Gamers without an ISP can sign up with Concentric for $19.95 per month.

Concentric debuts the latest online-game gateway.

XCar Web Site to Encourage Mods

True to the experimental nature of the racing vehicles in its XCar game, Bethesda has added gamer trading features to its XCar Web site (**www.xcar.com**). In addition to free tracks, cars, and utilities, the site will also support the game's Paintshop utility, which helps players design their own cars. Best of all, online gamers will be able to trade their creations from the site.

—George T. Chronis

Bethesda wants you to build your own racer online.

Pass the Bat'telh

Along with a beefy new company logo, MicroProse continues to buff up its long-term release schedule. Most notable is yet another *Star Trek* spin-off, Klingon: Honor Bound. This is the second MicroProse *Trek* title to use Epic's Unreal game engine, and it's already looking superb. The game takes the perspective of the Klingon code of honor and the rituals involved in Bat'telh tournaments. An early look was sufficient for us to be able to appease Trekkers with the news that it looks like it'll top all previous games set in this amazingly popular universe. Other MicroProse games are also looking smashing. With MechWarrior 3, graphic enhancements are just the first noticeable feature of the FASA team's changes to this huge franchise since they arrived at MicroProse. Another franchise entry to watch closely is MicroProse's X-COM 4, which is something of a departure from the previous three. While still maintaining the background storyline of corporate battles, this new game is going to be a space-based flight-action game. Parallels to the Wing Commander series, or the classic Elite, may not be far off the mark.

MechWarrior according to MicroProse.

Wizard Wars

Legions of followers of the classic Wizardry RPG series are already battering down Sir-tech's doors demanding information on the next installment. Be assured that it is in the making, it's working, and it's looking to eclipse the previous games, as hikes in technology allow greater visual impact in the fantasy worlds. It's also retaining the party-based system, including support for importing characters from a couple of the earlier titles.

Wizardry fans will be rewarded next year for their patience.

Thank You, Lara

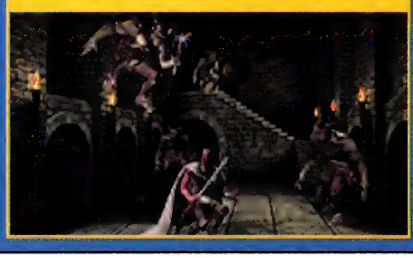
Sitting pretty thanks to Tomb Raider, Eidos has announced a slew of new titles for '98, including two hot-looking fantasy-action/RPG games and a smoking Apache helicopter sim. Forsaken is a dark fantasy-RPG/adventure with a good deal of action—much like Diablo. However, unlike Blizzard's RPG-lite approach, Forsaken will feature a rich storyline that unfolds through the course of the game, with heavy character interaction and development. Forsaken could be a breakthrough title in the RPG genre when it ships in the first quarter of next year. Plague is a real-time action strategy game rendered in 3D. You can choose to embrace good or evil: fight to become a crusader of the church or become The Dark Lord himself—it's up to you. Battles will take place on land and sea, and terrain will alter according to the passing of the seasons. Careful management of resources, commerce, and diplomacy will also play a part in determining your victory or defeat come March. As for the chopper sim, Team Apache is an ultrarealistic simulation of the AH-64A Apache attack helicopter. Developed for use with 3D-accelerator cards, Team Apache will run in 24-bit color (8-bit and 16-bit, too) and feature an advanced terrain system to heighten the realism. Work your way up from flying a single helicopter to leading an entire unit in battle. Look for it in January or February '98.

With 65,000 colors and dynamic real-time light-sourcing, Forsaken's 3D world is truly one to behold.

Epic Fantasy

Being major fans of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series of epic fantasy novels, we couldn't help thinking, "Wouldn't this make a great game?" Well, Epic MegaGames thinks so, too, and it's working on a game based on Jordan's work, appropriately titled Wheel of Time. Not a lot of details are available yet, but just checking out screens of the work in progress has us drooling for the game, which we'll have to wait for until late next year, or perhaps early 1999. —*George T. Chronis, Steve Klett, and Rob Smith*

Epic MegaGames is bringing Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* to the PC.



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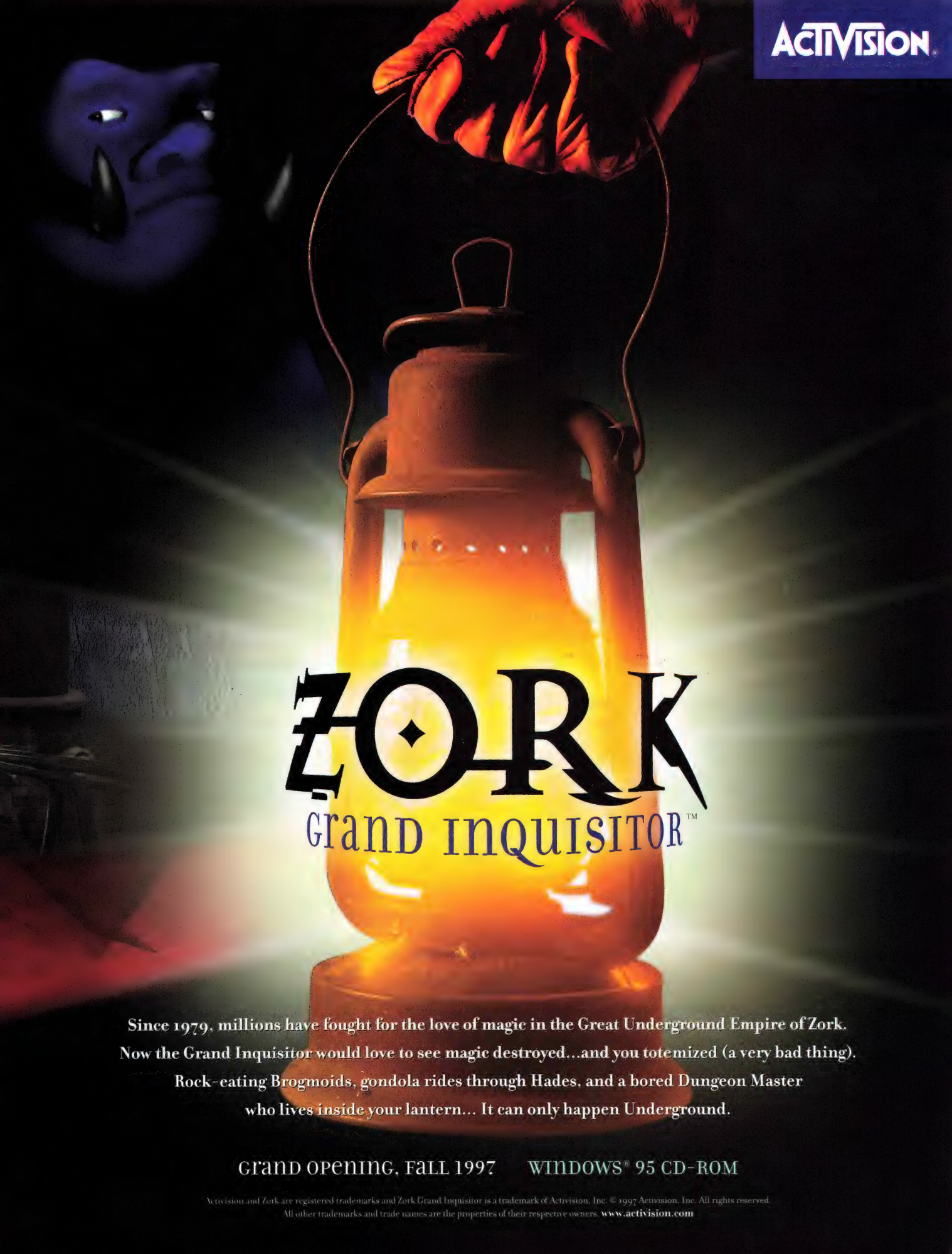
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Since 1979, millions have fought for the love of magic in the Great Underground Empire of Zork.
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New Micron Mod

Just after *PC Games* reviewed Micron's MXE P200 MMX system for our last issue, the computer-maker sent us an updated game system, the MME with Fusion 3D. The Fusion 3D has been tweaked for better gameplay and scored slightly higher benchmark numbers. The processor score went from 134 to 136, and the hard drive fell slightly from 143 to 141, but the video score jumped from 156 to 227. The boom in video prowess is a direct result of using Diamond's Stealth 3D Pro instead of the older Stealth 3D 2000 card. The only other major change is the substitution of one 32MB DIMM for the original two 16MB EDO SIMMs. In other respects, the Fusion 3D package is configured similarly to the MXE, with a 3.1 GB IDE hard drive and an internal Zip drive for under $2,500.

Micron's game-PC update ups performance.

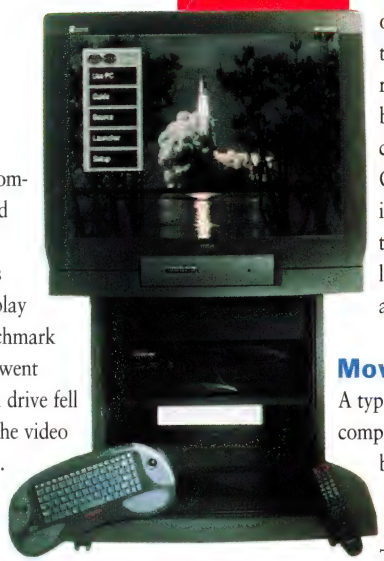
DVD-RAM Invades

While many consumers are still stuck trying to figure out whether they need a DVD-ROM upgrade kit for their computer, Hitachi America is about to add a new acronym to the consumer electronics confusion—DVD-RAM. Hitachi intends to ship its GF-1000 series of DVD-RAM drives by July, much sooner than many analysts expected.

With DVD-RAM you can record on a CD more than once.

Unlike DVD-ROM, DVD-RAM is a rewritable-disc medium—meaning information and images can be recorded on special five-inch discs, then later erased and recorded over again like a blank videotape. The drives can play standard DVDs and CDs, too. Hitachi is pricing its DVD-RAM drives at between $700 and $800 at launch and will offer ATAPI and SCSI models.

At $5,000, the PC Theatre is a home-theater bargain.



Move Over, Consoles

A typical example of how the computer industry intends to break into the family room is a joint venture between Compaq Computers and Thomson Consumer Electronics called the Compaq–RCA PC Theatre. At $4,999, the system seems expensive, but its features are impressive. Not only is the 35-inch progressive scanning monitor a high-resolution beauty, but it's also ready to receive high-definition television (HDTV) signals. Compaq is providing the P200 MMX hardware that makes the system run, so the PC Theatre is as computer game–ready as it is DVD movie–ready. All in chic black, of course.

MidiLand Gibs Prices

MidiLand is trying to blast its way into a larger customer base by selling its new Crescendo three-piece surround-sound speaker system for around $60 on the street. Based on Toshiba technology, the 17-watt subwoofer features low-vibration characteristics to better handle low-frequency bass. The two satellite speakers are rated at 4 watts each.

MidiLand surround sound for less.

Blown-hemi Aptiva Pentium

While the gaming world is agog over all the Pentium II hype, IBM has shipped a beefy 233MHz Pentium Aptiva-S stacked with some very serious components. The system features 48MB of SDRAM, a 24x CD-ROM drive, and a 6.4MB hard drive. The S35 will set you back between $2,500 and $3,000.

IBM breaks the 200MHz barrier.

Unfortunately, the price doesn't include the latest in 3D acceleration. The newest Aptivas come standard with ATI's Rage II video controller.

Zoom 56Ks

Buying a 56K modem is still an expensive proposition, but Zoom is bringing the consumer cost closer to $150 with its K56flex models. Priced on the street at around $170 for the external unit and $150 for the internal version, both feature plug-and-play installation and programmable digital-signal processors for easy x2 software upgrades.

Gamers Get Big Picture

ViewSonic has its hands around the neck of high monitor prices and won't back down. The company's Optiquest line has just put its new Q71 17-inch monitor (16-inch viewable area) on the streets for $499. With a .28 dot pitch, a maximum resolution of 1280-by-1024, and refresh rates up to 87Hz, the Q71 could become a candidate for upgrading a game system's existing monitor. The Q71 comes with Optiquest's standard three-year warranty.

ThrustMaster Locks On to Force-Feedback

ThrustMaster will use Immersion's force-feedback technology in its upcoming joysticks and steering wheels. The first ThrustMaster peripheral to be announced as using Immersion's I-Force scheme is the MotorSport T2 steering wheel, based on the existing T2 line of wheels.

ThrustMaster has signed with Immersion.

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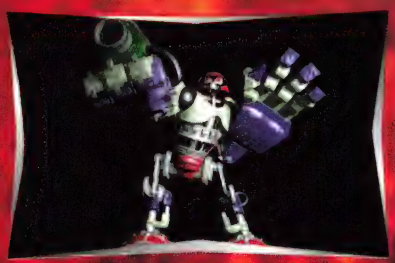
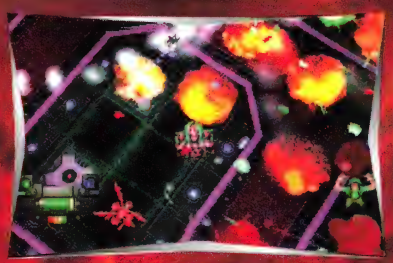
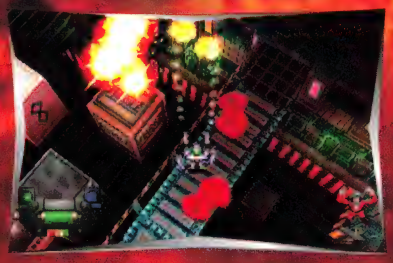


10 DEADLY CLASSES OF DROIDS each one more devastating than the last



THE ULTIMATE COMBAT CHALLENGE you must first waste the enemy – then take over their bodies and use their powers to crush even deadlier opponents



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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation

Online-Game Connection

GAME SERVICES

www.mpgn.com

Highlights:
Empire Builder, Imperium, Junta, Kingdom of Drakkar, Minion Hunter, Operation Market-Garden

Exclusives:
All

Upcoming:
DragonGard, Drakkar II, Empires Dawn, FiefQuest, Judgment Phoenix, Search and Destroy, Skulls, Bones, and Buccaneers, Warlords of the Apocalypse

Rates: $9.95/mo.

AOL keyword: WorldPlay

Highlights:
Backgammon, Bridge, Cribbage, Gin, Hearts, Spades

Exclusives:
Baldies Online, Tetris Online

Upcoming:
Baldies Online, Fantasy Adventures Online, Front Page Sports: Trophy Bass 2, MissionForce: CyberStorm, Poker, Shattered Light, Tetris Online

Rates: Available through AOL, EarthLink, AT&T WorldNet, and other subscription ISPs

www.2am.com

Highlights:
Alliance & Defiance, Animated Chess, Invisible Hand, Total War

Exclusives:
All

Upcoming:
Chain of Command

Rates: $10/mo., or $30 to become a Founding Member

www.gamesonline.com

Highlights:
Blood, Castles II, Darkness Falls, Descent Online, Redneck Rampage, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Splatterball, Virtual Pool, Warcraft II

Exclusives:
All games listed except Blood and Diablo

Upcoming:
Caesar's Palace Virtual Casino, Claw, Diablo, Dragon Dice, The Improv, The Lost World: Jurassic Park, U.S. Chess Federation

Rates: $1.95/hr. with ads, $2.50/hr. ad-free

www.mplayer.com

Highlights:
Battleship, C&C: Covert Ops, C&C: Red Alert, Crush! Deluxe, Diablo, Quake/Quake CTF, Risk, Scarab, War Wind

Exclusives:
Quake Tournament Play, Q-Ball

Upcoming:
ATF Gold, Blood, Chasm, Dominion, G-NOME, Havoc, Monopoly, Outlaw Racers, Star General

Rates: Free; Mplayer Plus: $29.95/yr. for access to special online tournaments and sponsored events

www.dwango.com

Highlights:
Blood, Doom, Doom II, G-NOME, HeliCOPS, Hellbender, Monster Truck Madness, NetMech, Shadow Warrior shareware, Strife

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Microsoft Flight Simulator '98, Europress Rally, Kart Precision Racing

Rates: $7.95/mo., $19/10 hrs., $34/20 hrs., $59/40 hrs.; $.99/hr. through Internet Gaming Zone

http://zone.com

Highlights:
Close Combat, Fighter Ace, Golf 3.0, Hellbender, Monster Truck Madness, Outlaws, Scrabble, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

Exclusives:
Microsoft/LucasArts titles

Upcoming:
Battleship, Jedi Knight, Star Wars: Rebellion

Rates: Free, except Fighter Ace (rates for this game have not been determined)

www.ten.net

Highlights:
Blood, C&C: Red Alert, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D and Atomic Edition, MOO II, Panzer General, Quake, Shadow Warrior, Warcraft

Exclusives:
Dark Sun: Crimson Souls, Duke Nukem 3D, EF2000, Shadow Warrior, Twilight Lands

Upcoming:
CivNET, Confirmed Kill, Falcon 4.0, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, Prey, SimCity 2000, Top Gun, Total Mayhem

Rates: Flat rate: $19.95/mo.; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95 each addtl. hr.

www.ariesgames.com

Highlights:
Air Warrior, Air Warrior II, CatchWord, Classic Card Games, Harpoon Online, Jack Nicklaus 4, Multiplayer: BattleTech: Solaris, Online Casino 2

Exclusives:
Jack Nicklaus 4, Silent Death

Upcoming:
Aliens Online, Silent Death

Rates: No extra charge through AOL and CompuServe

WORTHY GAME URLS

It's 3 a.m. and you're too dizzy to deathmatch but too wired to collapse on your bunk? Try these sites for more game-related information. We like 'em, and we think you will, too.

If you have any favorites, drop us a note at pcgamesletters@pcgames.com.

Case's Internet Gaming Ladder
www.igl.net

Dan's Quake Page
http://home.clara.net/patton/quake.html

Digital Nightmare: The Quest
www.idcomm.com/personal/chrisa/

Dioxide's Warcraft II Page
www.best.com/~edcheng/dioxide/

Erham's Warcraft II Page
http://home.att.net/~luckyed/index.html

Inferno's Realm
www.innercite.com/~mjones/main.htm

Raven's Real-Time Strategy
http://home1.gte.net/raven5/index.html

The Red Alert Page
www.prostar.com/web/progames/redalert/redfq.htm

Silicon Warlock
www.compuweb.nb.ca/cameron/

SRAP
http://dutsh31.stm.tudelft.nl/tms/people/alex/redalert/header.html

The Sub Pen
www.iwshome.com/cnc/ra

The Super Gaming Network
www.popi.net/~chase/index2.html

Total Adventure
www.snowhill.com/~jasonj/ta.html

Wolf's Den
www.nwlink.com/~wolf/

Zavier's Atomic Bomberman Page
http://userzweb.lightspeed.net/~rhett1/boom!.htm

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THE PLAYER

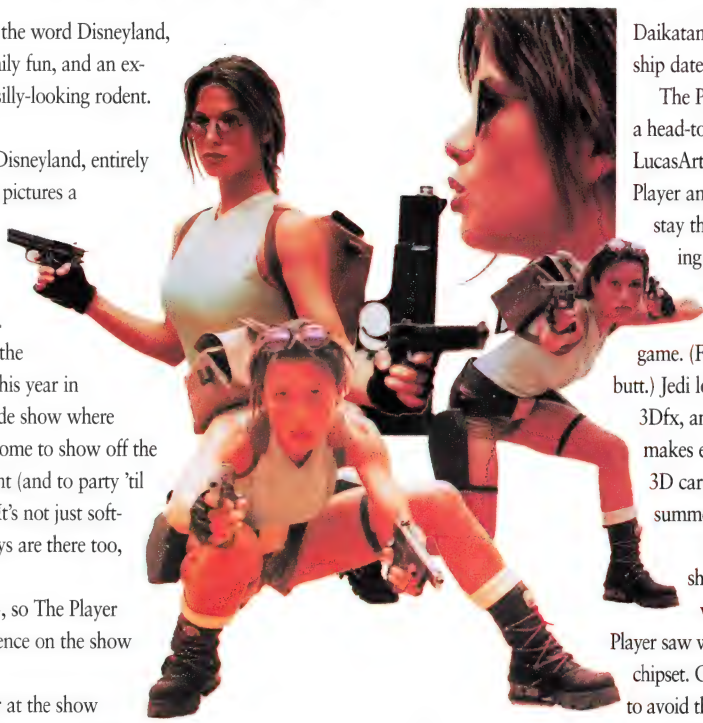
STEVE KLETT

"The Player expected the evolution from Quake to Quake 2 to parallel that of Doom to Doom II, but that's not the case."

Gaming Nirvana

Normal people, when they hear the word Disneyland, think of amusement rides, family fun, and an extremely large, overly friendly, silly-looking rodent. But, again, that's normal people.

When The Player hears the word Disneyland, entirely different imagery springs to mind. He pictures a cacophony of sounds, images, people, and amusements—but none are associated with either of the major tourist traps in Florida and California.



Instead, The Player thinks of E3—the Electronic Entertainment Expo, held this year in steamy Atlanta. This is the annual trade show where virtually all the world's gamemakers come to show off the hot titles that they have in development (and to party 'til the wee small hours of the morning). It's not just software, either; all the PC peripherals guys are there too, pushing their new gaming gadgetry.

Johnny Public's not welcome at E3, so The Player thought he'd share some of his experience on the show floor of gaming's Disneyland.

By far the biggest surprise this year at the show was that…well, there really were no surprises. No truly groundbreaking titles were announced. Instead, developers were largely content with showing how far along they've come with stuff they've been hyping since, well, last E3.

That said, a few first-person action games did manage to best The Player's expectations. Heading this list by far is Quake 2. With all the departures at id of late, it was reasonable to expect simply more of the same from the "technology" company. Thus, The Player expected the evolution from Quake to Quake 2 to parallel that of Doom to Doom II, but that's not the case. The monsters, the levels, the mixed-colored lighting, and the special effects were amazing—far and above those of Quake. The Player also really liked what designer Tim Willits had to say about the levels being more interactive, the monsters smarter, and the story (shock! horror!) much more involved.

Another development in the first-person action genre, and a potential sleeper megahit, is Sierra's Half-Life, which is based on the Quake engine. The level of interactivity, the characters, the AI, and the feel compared favorably to one of The Player's favorite games, Duke Nukem 3D. Always one to walk on the wild side, The Player was impressed by Ritual Entertainment's (formerly Hipnotic Interactive) inventive Sin. Epic's Unreal and Raven's Hexen II also continued to live up to early hype and expectations.

Ironically, Ion Storm's Daikatana drew the least "oohs and ahhhs," but then, it wasn't running on a 3D-accelerator board, and it wasn't nearly as complete as some other crowd-pleasers. The gameplay potential for John Romero's baby is too great to be dismissed so easily (check the game out for yourself on page 78). Daikatana will rock—it may miss its projected ship date, but it will rock.

The Player also faced off with Blade in a head-to-head Jedi Knight deathmatch in LucasArts' private meeting room. Both The Player and Blade would have been content to stay there for the duration of the show hacking it out with lightsabers, but they had to give up their posts—something about other people wanting to play the game. (For the record, The Player kicked Blade's butt.) Jedi looked simply amazing accelerated by 3Dfx, and it may very well be the killer app that makes everyone run out and get one of the hot 3D cards when the game comes out late this summer or early fall.

Speaking of 3Dfx, it was clear at this show who's won the first round of the 3D wars. Nearly every action game The Player saw was optimized specifically for the Voodoo chipset. Clearly, most developers are choosing to avoid the hassle of making their games D3D-compliant and are writing directly to the most powerful 3D chip available.

While this is great for 3Dfx—who, by the way, is promising to quadruple the power of its chipset every year through the year 2000—and The Player was blown away by many of the games he saw demo'd on a 3Dfx card, this may not be so good for gamers and 3D in general. 3Dfx may be the best performer on the block, but its market share—at least for the moment—is dwarfed by more established players sporting less impressive wares. Therefore, many gamers will be dismayed to find that their new 3D game won't run on their new PC that shipped standard with a 3D board from another company.

Regardless, this year's E3 was an awesome springboard for 3D acceleration, and we're beginning to see the first glimpses of the Holy Grail the PC offers for gaming. Many of this year's holiday titles are truly major technological leapfrogs over last year.

Strangely enough, The Player heard several colleagues murmuring about how there weren't many games that stood out from the crowd this year—as if that were a bad thing.

Well, they must have been at a different show. The fact is, nearly all the games on the floor looked fantastic: Starcraft, Dark Reign, Myth, Tomb Raider 2, Wing Commander Prophecy, Ultima Online, Populous: The Third Coming, EarthSiege 3—the list of potential A-List titles goes on and on. The quality of gaming is being raised across the board, and while there may be fewer titles on the shelves this Christmas, there will be far more good ones than you'll know what to do with.

Send your thoughts, column ideas, and life's savings to ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

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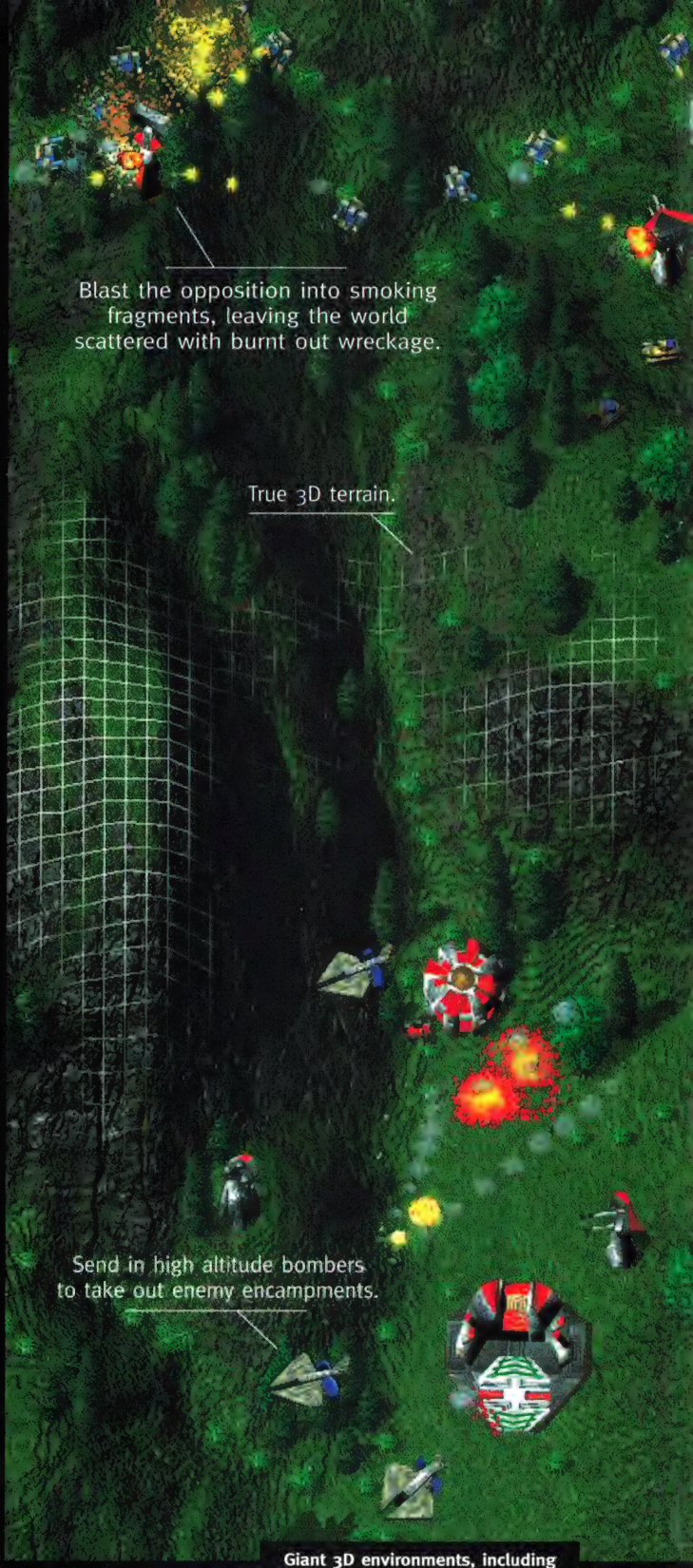
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THE OPPONENT

BLADE

The online-gaming services hold abundant potential—and problems galore. What can they do to keep gamers coming?

The Gates to Online Gaming

Like The Player, The Opponent also got a chance to cruise the gamer's utopia of E3 to peruse the wares of the world's software developers (and their mothers, judging by the number of people milling around). Naturally, it was the online world that was piquing his interest, and the first thing to report is that the news on this subject is good...and bad.

What stood out most about this year's show was how the games industry as a whole is maturing. It was quite evident that games are now fully considered a real business, where there are bucks to be made by the bucketload with the right product. Product managers, marketing folk, designers, and programmers were all in attendance to prove to the world that they really could "push that many polygons," "mix that many colors," and "explode the online-gaming world."

What was also painfully obvious was that the online-gaming concept is not yet out of diapers. In fact, it's quite possible that some of the existing online services have soiled themselves and will soon be looking for a change.

From a business standpoint—because, like it or not, it's hard cash that'll decide the winners and losers in the battle for survival—nobody could make up their mind. Panels of business leaders for these commendable, barrier-breaking, charge-leading online services still couldn't decide how the whole thing would pan out. Are there enough online advertising dollars available to support a service that can claim huge numbers of nonpaying subscribers? Are there enough gamers prepared to pay the fees on which another service depends?

Plus, there are those in the middle who are going the old ISP route of charges based on connect time. Are the games going to be compelling enough to generate the necessary traffic to fund continued development? As these services, their benefactors, and investment capitalists are no doubt realizing, it's going to take a virtually bottomless purse to survive these early steps before reaping the potential rewards. (The good news is that nearly everyone accepts that the rewards will be there; it's just a question of when.)

Who can supply that bottomless purse and has the weight, position, and true potential to survive the hard times? Enter, stage central: Mr. Gates and his Microsoft Corporation. Already, Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone has scooped the competition for the rights to LucasArts' eagerly anticipated range of titles. Over 500 people were at **www.zone.com** on Day One of X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter's release to put the superb multiplayer elements to the test. With Jedi Knight still to come (and don't believe a word of The Player's deranged ramblings about beating The Opponent in a JK deathmatch), IGZ still has great games on the way. And it's free. And it's got Microsoft behind it, although if you didn't know this last fact, they evidently weren't eager to give it away. A proliferation of billboards splashed with **www.zone.com** adorned Atlanta, the word "Microsoft" conspicuous by its absence. (Chalk this up to marketing awareness: Gamers hate Microsoft, don't they? And Microsoft knows it.)

Fortunately, it's not online and multiplayer games themselves that are in a shaky position. But they are at risk of being released without the services around to supply the backbone for playing them. The number of single-player–only games at E3 could be counted on very few fingers. It was evident, though, that the whole latency issue is still some way from being resolved as far as fluid gameplay is concerned. Many of the multiplayer games were offering great numbers for LAN support, but the Internet remains a difficult nut to crack.

Is it really conceivable, given current standard ping times, that a game like Sega's Virtua Fighter 2—which requires such speed in reaction and movement—could be played over the Internet? Sega seems to think so, which is really good news—if it shakes down that way.

Likewise, such titles as Activision's real-time-strategy newcomer Dark Reign and Origin's Ultima Online are showing that games other than first-person shooters have a place in the online environment without the service providers. And as companies like Electronic Arts offer PGA Tour online (for free), and as Activision supports I-76 and Sierra backs The Realm on their own *free* servers, where does that leave the online services?

How about working out a better solution to the latency problems that currently dog the games? Rather than just procrastinating about the low ping times, shouldn't online-gaming companies concentrate on achieving gameplay that's truly comparable to playing over a LAN? Wouldn't that make players flood to the services? It's easier said than done, of course, but it has to be the primary focus of these businesses—and whoever gets there first really will be onto a winner.

A maturing of the community spirit by gamers (see The Opponent, July/August, page 42) would also help bring more people to the online world. So would service providers supplying an outlet for companies who can produce high-quality product but lack corporate funding (3D Realms on TEN being the most obvious case in point). Together, these things will be the focal point for the online services' survival.

But it's still so early in this whole aspect of gaming. Blossoming it is, booming it may do, but who's there at the end to reap the rewards? The Opponent's money—hmm, he hates to admit it, but it's on Seattle.

The usual begging letters can still be sent to blade@pcgames.com. No, we don't have any spare copies of Warcraft II or Quake. We apologize for the inconvenience.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

QUOTED FROM THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY TELEVISION SPECIAL

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Uncover The Shocking Secrets Behind The Original Vulcan/Romulan Conflict

A "One-Click" Interface Offers Immersive, Fast-Paced Action

ACTUAL CHARACTERS AS THEY APPEAR IN THE GAME

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Paramount

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The Mercenary

Don St. John

What will the industry's current glut mean for gamers? Eventually, fewer options.

Too Much of a Good Thing

So many games, so little time. That spells T-R-O-U-B-L-E for large segments of the gaming industry—and maybe for you, in the long run. In the short term, of course, it's great; you're almost guaranteed to have a killer game or 10 at your disposal come Christmastime, assuming your disposable income will cover that many.

But the number of choices is, at this point, truly insane. Consider this: At the recent Electronic Entertainment Expo, 1,500 titles were being shown off by hundreds of companies—and this at a show almost 100 percent dominated by games, unlike other years when broader multimedia cut into that total. Now, who could imagine even trying to play a tenth of those?

I certainly can't, and playing games is part of my job. I have a running joke with the folks at Sierra On-Line about the slew of games they ship every year from early October to early December. At the height of the onslaught, it seems like we get a new game to review every other day. So, we divvy them up, and I get around to the ones I'm not actually reviewing by April or so—if I'm lucky. Now, for Sierra and other companies of that size, given their longtime presence in the games market and the quality and diversity of their titles, that sort of release pattern is actually a good idea.

What it does, though, is make it rough on other companies. It's not just little producers feeling the pressure, either. Viacom NewMedia, GTE Entertainment, and Ignite (the short-lived merger of Inscape and Graphix Zone) were three prominent folded hands that caught me quite by surprise. Less startling is the generation of companies that were putting out good stuff a couple of years ago and are today hanging by a thread that's inevitably going to break.

Let's face it: This many games can't make it in any market, no matter how good they are...and hundreds of them really are that good. These days, gameland is an increasingly mature place where you need lots of development money and time. As more companies give it up, nobody's coming out of their garage anymore with something that blows away Jedi Knight, Quake, or the other superb-looking stuff we're all awaiting. What does that mean for you? Eventually, fewer options, with all that entails: higher prices (as companies try to justify their investments), less attention to play and story (as companies worry first about the technology rat race), and limited platform and peripherals requirements (as companies demand you use the newest, fastest machines and specific 3D accelerators). Another problem is the potential for deteriorating creativity, as behemoth companies find themselves without anyone pushing the creative envelope except themselves.

On top of that, we've already noted in past issues that it's easier than ever to find one game and stick with it, thanks to the advent of multiplay and the increased depth of single-play levels. So what was the buzzword at E3? "Massively multiplayer persistent worlds." In English, that's online games where you can spend all of your gaming time fighting, "socially interacting" (i.e., cruising for virtual babes), running a newspaper—whatever you want, really. When you leave, your character and all your stuff are there waiting for when you get back. Are people immersed in Ultima Online, for instance, really going to play anything else?

Not bloody likely, as my colleague Rob Smith likes to say. This is shaping up as one of those times when there are too many choices, a phrase I never thought I'd use. But you can't play every first-person shooter; there are too many, even for me. You can't possibly play every real-time strategy game; everybody still thinks they've got the next Warcraft/C&C smash. And the categories get more and more specific: I don't think you could even play every pirates-on-the-deep-blue-sea game I saw at E3.

Now, if release schedules were staggered better, the problem would abate somewhat. Does every movie, rock album, and book come out in a three-month window? Of course not. People have cash 12 months a year, and they're looking for new stuff during slow periods. It's dumb for games to crowd into a tight release schedule just because of the Christmas buying season. But that still doesn't take care of the basic problem—the sheer number of games on the way.

I always say that I'm not an optimist or a pessimist; I'm a realist. Well, I'm afraid that a realistic view of today's gaming industry looks something like that sports car James Dean was driving, about 30 seconds before he wrecked it. If there was ever too much of a good thing, this is it—and it can't last.

This month's Mercenary wants to hear your thoughts on the cascade of titles flooding the market. Send your thoughts, musings, and swashbuckling games to dstjohn@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

PREPARE TO ENTER

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

One Grand Prize

Pentium 200 courtesy of Micronics and Orchid Technologies featuring:

- 32 MB RAM, 2 GB Hard Drive, 4x CD ROM
- SoundBlaster 16
- Orchid Kelvin 64 video card
- Orchid Righteous 3D card featuring 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics
- Microsoft Win95
- Thrustmaster Rage 3D Gamepad
- EIDOS Interactive's Deathtrap Dungeon

Eight First Prizes

- Orchid Righteous 3D card featuring 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics
- Thrustmaster Rage 3D Gamepad

Ten Second Prizes

- EIDOS Interactive's Deathtrap Dungeon
- Official Deathtrap Dungeon Strategy Guide

3Dfx Interactive

RIGHTEOUS 3D ORCHID

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-IAN LIVINGSTONE'S-

DEATHTRAP Dungeon

Clue #1: WARNED

www.eidosinteractive.com

1. No purchase necessary. To enter, find the three clues at the following locations: Clue #1 in this ad, clue #2 at www.pcgames.com (Deathtrap Dungeon Contest), clue #3 at www.eidosinteractive.com (Deathtrap Dungeon Contest). After finding all three clues, register the winning phrase at www.eidosinteractive.com at the Deathtrap Dungeon Contest page. No purchase or payment of any money is necessary to enter. One entry per household. Entries must be received by October 31, 1997. All entries become exclusive property of EIDOS Interactive and will not be acknowledged or returned. Only one prize per family, organization, or household.

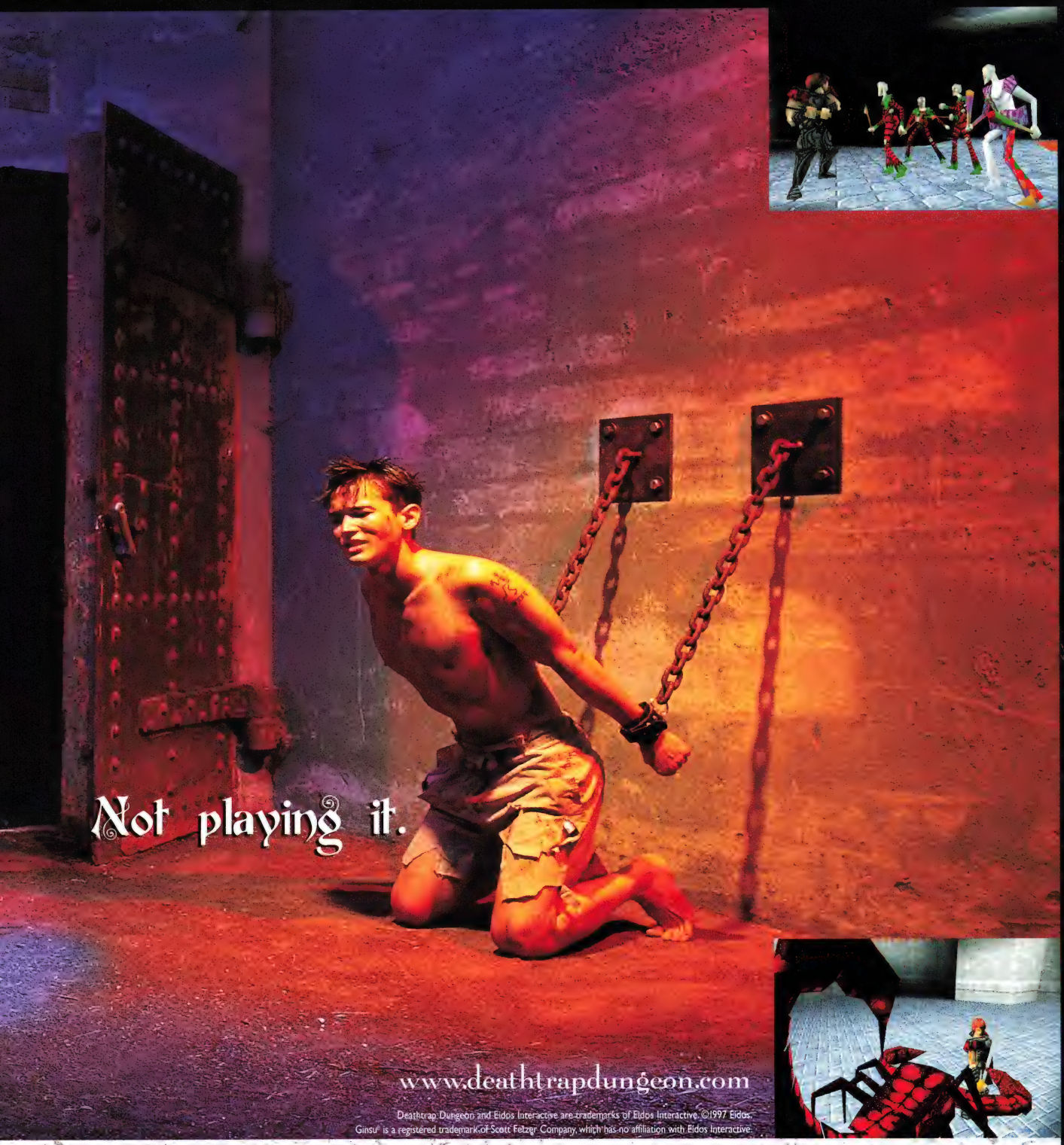
2. Prizes: One Grand Prize winner will receive a Pentium 200 courtesy of Micronics and Orchid Technologies. The system will have 32 MB RAM, 2GB Hard Drive, SoundBlaster 16, 4x CD ROM, Orchid Kelvin 64 Video Card, Orchid Righteous 3D featuring 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics, Microsoft Win95, mouse and keyboard. In addition, the Grand Prize winner will receive a Thrustmaster Rage 3D gamepad and a copy of Deathtrap Dungeon. Eight First Prize winners will receive an Orchid Righteous 3D card featuring 3Dfx's Voodoo Graphics and a Thrustmaster Rage 3D gamepad. Ten Second Prize winners will receive a copy of Deathtrap Dungeon and the official Deathtrap Dungeon strategy guide. 3. Eligibility: Sweepstakes open to residents of United States and Canada. Non-compliance with the time parameters contained herein or return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. In the event of disqualification, Grand Prize, First Prizes and Second Prizes will be awarded to the next available entry. Runner up winners will be notified by mail. By acceptance, winner(s) agree to the use of their name and /or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. EIDOS Interactive is not responsible for any damages, taxes, or expense that consumers might incur as a result of this contest or receipt of prize. Winners accepting prize(s) agree that all prize(s) are awarded on the condition that EIDOS Interactive and its agents, representatives, and employees will have no liability whatsoever for any injuries, losses or damages of any kind resulting from acceptance, possession, or use of the prize(s). 4. List of winners: For a list of winners, go to the Deathtrap Dungeon Contest page at www.eidosinteractive.com. A winners' list will be posted by November 3, 1997. 5. Restrictions: Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All federal, state and local regulations apply. 6. Sponsors: This sweepstakes is sponsored by EIDOS Interactive, 3Dfx, Orchid Technologies, Thrustmaster and PC Games. EIDOS Interactive and Deathtrap Dungeon are registered trademarks of EIDOS plc. © 1997 EIDOS. The 3Dfx Interactive logo, Voodoo Graphics, Voodoo, and Voodoo Rush are trademarks of 3Dfx Interactive, Inc. © 1997 3Dfx Interactive, Inc. Orchid Righteous 3D and the Orchid logo are trademarks of Orchid Technology, Inc. © 1997 Orchid Technology. Thrustmaster and Rage 3D are trademarks of Thrustmaster. © 1997 Thrustmaster.

There's only one thing more torturous than playing Deathtrap Dungeon.

IAN LIVINGSTONE'S

DEATHTRAP Dungeon

"Beat me. Whip me. Just don't hit that Quit button." Consider it your battle cry. Then bring on the skeletal warriors, zombies and countless other undead denizens. Each one is another chance to slice and dice like a Ginsu® knife gone bad. Or simply cast a spell



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on the evil priestess who's done you wrong. Because in this cavernous maze of devious traps, it's all about cheating death at every turn, blurring that fine line between pleasure and pain. And just when you think you can't take it anymore, consider the alternative.

PC CD

PlayStation

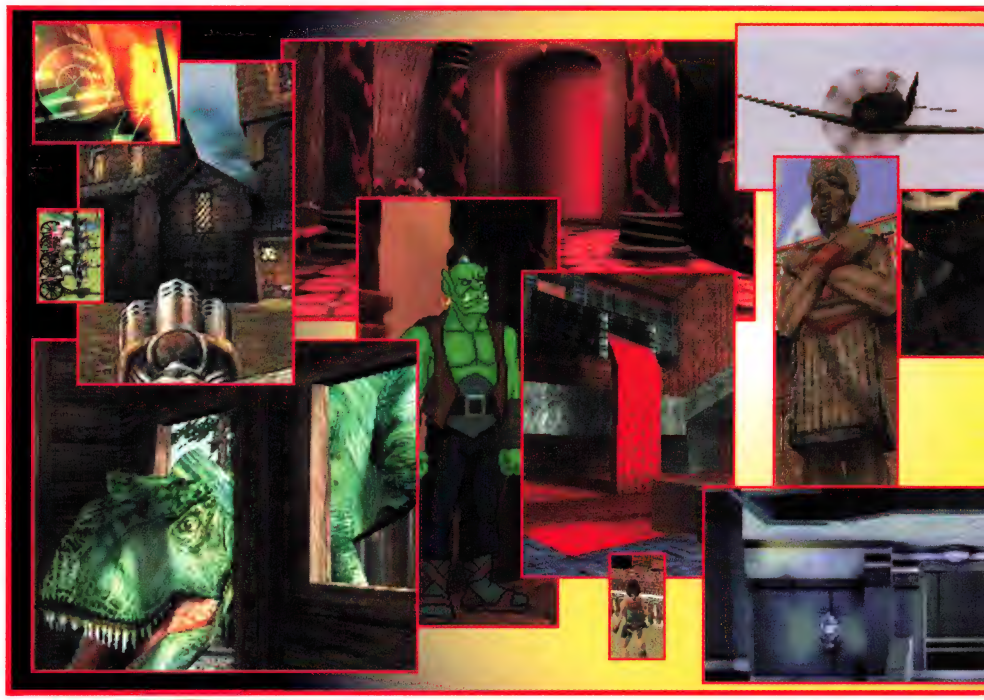
EIDOS INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

THE GAMES OF AUTUMN

By The *PC Games* Staff

We've all played last year's games to death. No problem: Your favorite store's loading dock is waiting for a bumper crop of new games that aim to make your eyes bug out and your trigger fingers twitch. But don't reach for your wallet until you check out PC Games' Games to Play—our detailed look at the best bets for this fall.



As usual, there are hundreds of games coming to store shelves near you in the coming months. As usual, it's going to be one hell of a neat trick to separate facts from hype and figure out what to buy—even to figure out if the one title you're *certain* is going to be killer is really the next generation of gaming, a total dog, or some level of mediocrity in between.

Well, what's the problem here? Isn't that what you read us for? And *PC Games* is here to deliver. Over the past several months, we've had good looks at everything coming down the pike. We've talked to producers, concept developers, artists, coders. We've gone on the road for exclusive looks at A-list titles in progress, even getting to check out actual gameplay on some of the ones closer to completion. We've had companies visit our offices for show-and-tell. And, of course, we blanketed the annual monster gamefest, the Electronic Entertainment Expo, where the curtain went up on everything.

In the process, we saw scores of good-looking games. So we put together a list of the ones we're most anticipating, ranked in order of interest using a rough-but-ready set of criteria. Is the concept cool? Does it look awesome? Is the gameplay first-rate? Most importantly, given what's out there now, how much are we salivating for it? One warning: These aren't all finished games. Some may disappoint in the end, while others may exceed our expectations—and yours. But if we were oddsmakers in Vegas, these are the ones we'd have at 2-1 or better. Read on...and then place your bets.

1 MYTH

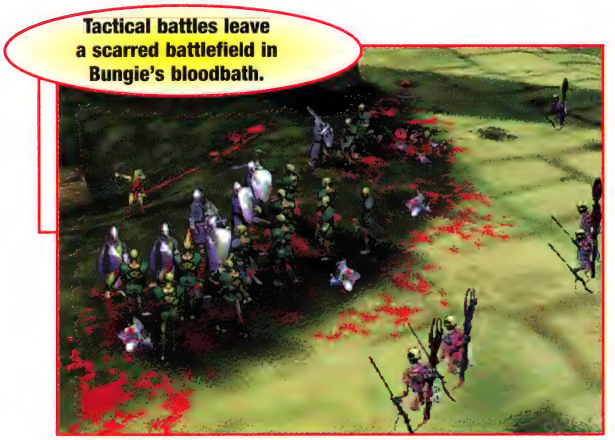
Bungie 12/97

Myth may be the game that turns Bungie into a force to be reckoned with in the PC world—at least a force commensurate with its lofty status among Macintosh gamers. The guys that brought us Pathways Into Darkness and Marathon have turned their attentions to real-time fantasy wargaming, and the result is outstanding.

With a 3D viewpoint that can pivot 360 degrees on an axis, letting you see everything from all angles, you command your stalwart forces in battle or in scenarios such as Capture the Flag. The forces against you can be anything from skilled swordsmen to near-bodiless spearmen. Throw in the obligatory skeleton foot soldiers and grenade-throwing dwarves, and you get the idea. There are plenty of creative touches as well. Assaulted by a squad of the undead? Send your fat friar to heal them. Only problem is, when you heal the undead, they vaporize.

Myth will look extra cool for Voodoo owners.

Myth looks great in SVGA, and even better when it's 3Dfx Voodoo–accelerated. Bungie promises a cross-platform release and cross-platform multiplayer options. Even with all of the releases we've seen, we know there aren't many original ideas out there. But Myth cements Bungie's growing reputation as an inventive house that can concentrate on one good idea and exploit it to its fullest.



Tactical battles leave a scarred battlefield in Bungie's bloodbath.

2 JEDI KNIGHT

LucasArts 8/97

Does it need any introduction? LucasArts' super-anticipated follow-up to Dark Forces looks to be living up to its awe-inspiring potential. Expansive levels add a tremendous sense of scale to the setting and provide excellent single-player and multiplayer environments. The enemies are highly intelligent and die in style when slain by any of the 10 weapons (picking a baddie off on the edge of a platform and watching him plummet into a black, bottomless shaft imparts the purest joy).

As Kyle Katarn sets off on the road to Jedi status, the option to choose sides at a key point in the plotline is awaited with eager anticipation. Simply getting to this point is a challenge; the Force begins to play a part, and mastering its powers becomes crucial to success. The role-playing style of character development should add a great deal to the game's varied playing experience and replay value.

In Jedi, you'll fight for or against the Rebellion.

We've all been waiting for this for a long time, and *PC Games* has been fortunate enough to see its development firsthand. The initial buzz has only grown stronger as each new version has revealed more details, more features, and more potential for absorbing gameplay. The good news, folks, is that it's nearly here...

A true Jedi uses the lightsaber.

FALL ONLINE

Online play may still be trickling its way into the gamer's consciousness, but the host of online-only games slated for later this year suggests that developers, at least, are tackling the task of bringing online play further into the mainstream. The exciting **Aliens Online** (see page 61) isn't the only cool-looking offering—not by a long shot.

For starters, flyers will appreciate the release of **WarBirds 2.0**, the follow-up to last year's *PC Games*' Online Game of the Year. I-Magic Online is preparing to include a bevy of new features and airplanes that should further entrench it as the online flight sim to beat. The most notable new 3D feature is rolling terrain and hazing that will give Warbirds arenas and scenarios a much more realistic look and feel. There's also a host of new effects, such as enhanced explosions, flak bursts and muzzle flashes, and sinking ships. A totally mouse-driven interface aimed at making Warbirds easier for novices to get into will replace the current command-based interface as well. Add an assortment of new planes, including the Hurricane Mk IIc, Spitfire Mk Ia, the German Bf 109E-4, and two variants of the Bf-110, and you have exciting prospects in the not-so-friendly skies.

Developer VR-1 is wading into "massively multiplayer" online play in a big, graphically bold fashion, having already done Fighter Ace for Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. They're not resting on flight-sim laurels, with a startlingly fast sub sim, **The S.A.R.A.C. Project**; **Nomads of Klanth**, a unique cross between desert-based vehicle combat and RPG play; **UltraCorps**, a huge galactic strategy sim; and **VR-1 Crossroads**, a step back toward traditional MUDs that plops you into a text-based arena full of intrigue and conspiracy. VR-1 is currently working out deals to bring each game to online play.

Meanwhile, SegaSoft is cranking up several games designed specifically for its nascent HEAT.NET network, most notably **10^{six}**, an action/strategy game that can track 1 million players (hence the title); **Vigilance**, which lets you form an anti-terrorist team for action play in a future world; and **Skies**, where you play a winged character who can develop physically as your character grows. All three games will feature a Sega technology, Transactor,

This Quake 2 imp has better AI than the beasties in the first game.

QUAKE 2

id Software 10/97

Flog us for assuming that Quake 2 would be to Quake what Doom II was to Doom—a minor enhancement to the original. In fact, the opposite is true. Doom was a phenomenal step forward in PC gaming, followed by a commercial sequel. Quake, on the other hand, turned out to be a half-finished work in progress with flashes of genius. After witnessing what id has wrought with Quake 2, the gods have spoken, and we have felt the thunderbolt. Quake 2 is the first-person shooter to beat for the foreseeable future.

Based on an early build of Quake 2 that *PC Games* was fortunate enough to play, it's obvious that the criticisms hurled at Quake regarding monochromatic levels, uninteresting monsters, and a lackluster single-player experience were taken seriously by id.

Throughout Quake 2, id has added mechanical effects to objects to enhance their look and utility. The result is a lot more level detail and player interactivity. Much as in Duke Nukem 3D, but with far greater élan, player-controlled characters actually have moving machines and edifices to navigate around.

The monsters haven't been left out, either. Go up against a guard with a handheld grenade launcher, and you'll see the weapon open like a flower before firing. Also, just like the Predator, another creature has a shoulder-mounted weapon that cycles up into firing position.

See the blue band on this guy's weapon? That's an independent light source.

Best of all, the lighting effects are astounding. Weapons, items, creatures, and structures all pulsate with their own light sources—the *Eraser*-inspired railgun is particularly impressive. Factor in the enhanced level lighting and shadows, and the effect is jaw-dropping. Granted, all this was over a 3Dfx Voodoo graphics card, but nevertheless, Quake 2 is an impressive piece of work.

that lets HEAT.NET administrators add custom limited-edition objects, weapons, and other goods to HEAT games any time they like, creating a semi-persistent universe.

Mindscape joins the online wars with a subsidiary, Headlands Digital Media, that's offering a simple, fast combat game tentatively called **NetWars**. This blast-everything-that-moves shooter features copter and vehicle warfare that shines in crisp SVGA and rumbles along nicely over a 33.6 modem. A summer-long beta test likely will have given way to full play by the time you read this.

Another software developer providing exclusive proprietary content on its Web site is 2AM Interactive, the Israeli firm responsible for **Total War**. Its site at **www.2am.com** is currently host to a pair of innovative online games for play at a $10 monthly cost. **Chain of Command** is a real-time infantry tactical sim in which online players are a single man in an organized military hierarchy; if you're a private, for instance, you're one of a unit being commanded by a corporal, and he's one of three corporals commanded by a sergeant, all the way up to major. You advance in rank by being awarded points by your commanding officer, so there's an incentive to do what he says—yet if you get killed, you have to start over as a private, so there's incentive to stay alive, too.

Meanwhile, 2AM's business sim, **Invisible Hand**, drops players into a truly "free" market where they run corporations and compete, working in a real-world political and economic environment in which everyone needs other people's support to succeed.

Although the online services have been more quiet about their plans of late, a couple aren't without online-only games to add to the mix. Engage will be featuring a version of **The Lost World: Jurassic Park** that will be the only PC version of the widely available console title. Meanwhile, MPG-Net, long known for developing games particular to its service, has been the busiest of all, with titles like **DragonGard**, a 3D RPG that'll support thousands of players simultaneously; **FiefQuest**, a fantasy-based strategy that will emphasize social skills as a way of staying on top of the heap; and **Skulls, Bones, and Buccaneers**, a real-time pirate adventure that draws inspiration partly from MPG-Net's Key West, Florida, setting.

You'll explore gloriously detailed settings in Oddworld.

4 ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODYSSEE

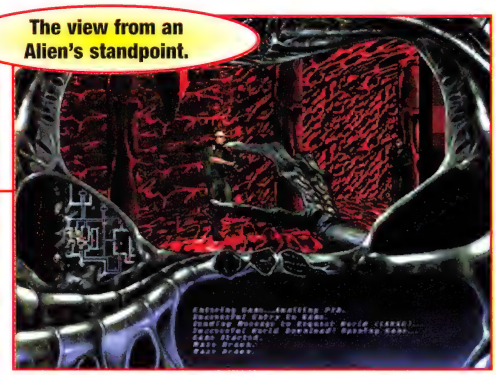
GT Interactive 11/97

Oddworld Inhabitants, creators of a Mudokon slave laborer called Abe, promises a whole new game genre. In what at first looks like merely a glorified platform game, Abe's Odyssee casts the hero in the role of species savior. After discovering that his masters are planning on turning him and his buddies into the latest delicacy at the food-processing plant, he decides not to be Soylent Green and takes it on himself to save his comrades. What results is a race, chase, and spaced-out adventure. Using "GameSpeak," you get to control what and how Abe relates to his environment. Using simple commands such as "stay" and "follow me," you guide the rescuees to a portal that leads to safety from the RuptureFarms plant. Abe can also whistle and fart, run, tiptoe through the shadows, and leap over danger on command. To add a moral sense to the tale, Abe is forced to make certain critical decisions along the way, leading to a potentially varied perception of his contribution to the race at the end of the adventure. Remember, it's always the winners who write history.

5 ALIENS ONLINE

Aries Online Games 9/97

There's no lack of online games in your future (see "Fall Online," page 60), but one that looks particularly outrageous is Aliens Online from Aries Online Games and Interworld. Yes, it's *that* Aliens—in fact, this is the first licensed franchise to make it to online play, tapping the buzz from the upcoming movie *Alien Resurrection*. Expect a sniper's dream that's true to the claustrophobic movie environments, with lots of ducts and narrow corridors to traverse—and lots of holes for enemies to drop from. You can play as an Alien or a Colonial Marine, with different abilities and weapons available to you. An open beta period is slated to start on or about September 1.



The view from an Alien's standpoint.

6 UNREAL

Epic MegaGames 10/97

Epic's much-talked-about first-person action game, Unreal, is looking fine indeed. Since we did our cover story in June (you can read it online at **www.pcgames.com**), the game's ship date has moved back a bit, and it's now expected in late September in shareware form, with the full game available before Christmas. We don't think you'll mind the wait when you see what Epic's got up its sleeve.

We've had another chance to play the game, and it's got a distinct look and feel all its own, which will be increasingly important this fall when a host of quality first-person titles is due to hit the streets. The enemy animations are incredibly fluid, the environs fully exploit the 3D capabilities of the

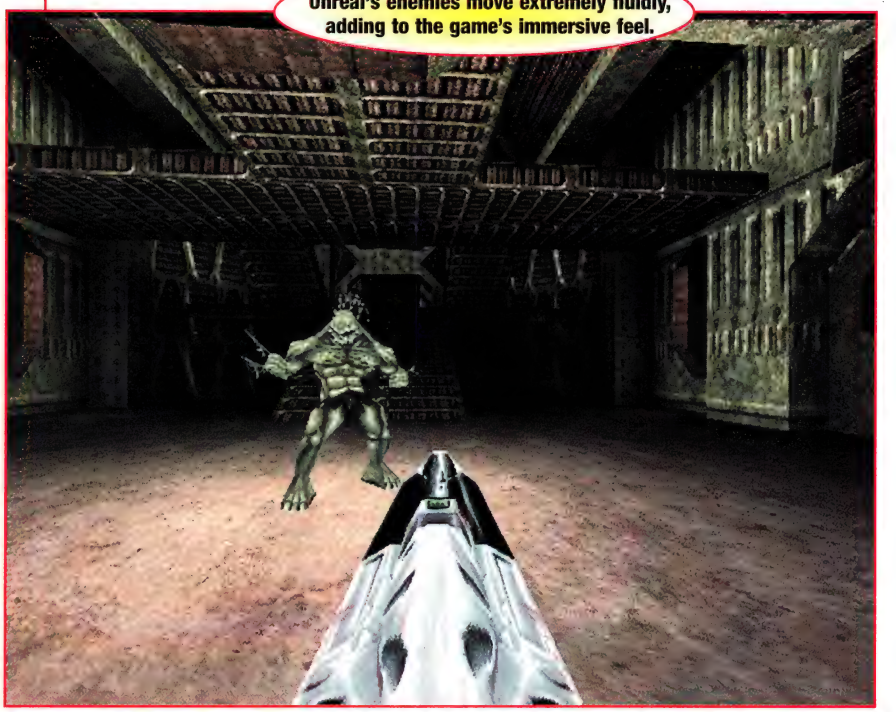
SLEEPERS

We get tired of hype, too, y'know. That's probably why everyone on the *PC Games* staff jumped at the chance to pick a "sleeper" from everything we've seen lately—a game that may not have all the buzz that a Quake 2 might generate, but that we think you'll love anyway. Check 'em out.

Steve Klett, Editor in Chief
Fighter Squadron: Screamin' Demons Over Europe (Activision)—Eric "Hellcats" Parker is something of a legend among flight-sim enthusiasts—particularly on the Mac—for his games Hellcats Over the Pacific, A-10 Attack!, and A-10 Cuba!. Well, Mr. Hellcats is at it again, and he may well raise the standard for WWII sims with Screaming Demons Over Europe. You can fly for either the American, English, or German air forces in engagements over the English Channel, the German Rhineland, or North Africa, in any one of nine historic aircraft modeled in amazingly detailed 3D. All aircraft surfaces that should move will, every physics effect for every type of airframe stress you can think of is accounted for, and the aircraft themselves are extremely beautiful—with or without a 3D card. The game environment is being designed to be as realistic and unpredictable as possible, which should result in virtually limitless replayability.

Rob Smith, Senior Reviews Editor
Virtua Fighter 2 (Sega)—Sega is struggling with the Saturn, but its foray into the PC market is looking like a well-considered move, backed by some quality products. While Worldwide Soccer and Daytona USA Deluxe are also impressive, top of my list is Virtua Fighter 2—familiar to many console gamers—which is adding new features for the PC release. Best among these is the team melee mode, throwing 3-on-3 or 5-on-5 combatants into the melting pot. IPX (and RIPX for use over HEAT.NET) and TCP/IP support will allow Internet play—for a fighting game!

George T. Chronis, News & Technology Editor
Overboard (Psygnosis)—In a harsh, serious world dominated by first-person shooters, there's always room for a fun platform game to



Unreal's enemies move extremely fluidly, adding to the game's immersive feel.

Unreal engine, the weapons are fresh and inventive, and the textures are amazingly detailed.

Running on the 3Dfx, Unreal didn't impress us at first as much as other games such as Quake 2, but then we realized that's because the game looked so damn good from the outset—without acceleration. Add to this the incredibly easy-to-use 3D editor that Epic will release to the public, and you have one hell of a compelling package.

7 HALF-LIFE

Sierra On-Line 11/97

Ah, thank god for the endlessly tweakable Quake engine. That's why Sierra can put out Half-Life, a first-person action shooter with some of the most promising environments and AI we've seen in the genre. Gorgeous, dynamic texturing and intricate levels (at least at this early stage) are desirable anytime, but Half-Life goes deeper. For instance, how about enemies that don't shoot at you—unless you shoot at them first? Or squads that operate as a team instead of rushing at you willy-nilly? The level and graphical design are a cut above most shooters, too, with dynamic lighting and shadowing that'll conceal you even from the advanced AI. And, of course, you get the now-obligatory Internet play (in this case, 32 players). Half-Life may very well be a formidable contender in this year's first-person action sweepstakes. Looks like Sierra's branching out—bigtime.

8 HEXEN II

Activision 9/97

For those of us in the vocal minority who thought Hexen wasn't as big an improvement over Heretic as the masses made it out to be, Hexen II is genuinely worthy of the hype it's generated. Raven is again at the helm, but this time out, the foundation is the Quake engine, and 3D acceleration has finally made it possible to realize Hexen's fantasy realm in a way the original's Doom engine never could.

As before, you get multiple character choices—Crusader, Paladin, Necromancer, and Assassin—and can play as any of the four in multiplayer games. The Assassin is a truly inspired addition—and it's a woman. She wields a crossbow, bombs,

Half-Life's environments add intricacy to action.

remind you why you started playing electronic games in the first place. Overboard is just such a game. The theme is your basic Pirates of the Caribbean adventure, in which players maneuver their two masters between colorful obstacles, do battle against other ships, and take out some very creative shore batteries. It's all very stylized and youthful, but like Mario 64 and Mickey Mania before it, it's very challenging. Best of all, it's a PC game.

Don St. John, Features Editor
Pandemonium 2 (Crystal Dynamics)—The first Pandemonium was a nice Mario-style game that translated well to the PC but didn't have anything groundbreaking about it. Its sequel takes care of that: You have *never* seen platform levels like this. The designers have gleefully thrown every rule out of the book, coming up with insane camera angles, bizarre tasks, and pathways that don't seem to exist in anything we know as physical space. Typical is the level patterned after the surreal art of M.C. Escher. This startling game is truly from the other side of Alice's looking glass.

Corey Cohen,
Associate Managing Editor
Virtual Springfield (Fox Interactive)—Why watch *The Simpsons* when you can live it? This hilarious 3D re-creation of the TV family's hometown lets you toss water balloons from Bart's Tree House, lob gummy bears in the local movie theater (see Milhouse squirm!), watch Mayor Quimby take some "campaign contributions," and more. Fifty interactive locations, voices by the show's cast, sounds from the show, and 35,000 frames of original animation should make for a way-cool experience.

Daniel Morris, Assistant Editor
Crucible (Maxis)—This online-geared fantasy game from Maxis presents a Gauntlet-style view of numerous fantasy realms that can be accessed through various transportation portals. Players will find that their actions online directly affect their character—for example, slaughtering a colony of giant ants may earn you the nickname Ant-Bane, and then you'll have a hard time convincing the realm's giant ants to leave you alone. Crucible looks to be one of the most customizable fantasy games available online, with realm editors included in the retail software.

Even in SVGA, Hexen II looks great.

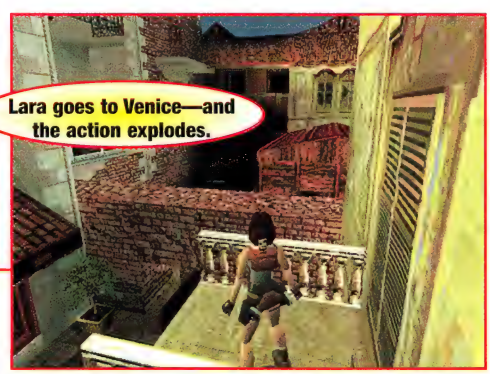
and a truly nasty blade, and she'll even become translucent if you leave her motionless in the shadows. As for the dark creatures waiting for you, expect some old friends from Hexen, as well as a host of new opponents. The most notable is an angel-like apparition who is deadly as she hovers in the rafters, translucent like the Assassin.

As for the levels, they're gorgeous. Especially attractive is an ancient Egyptian level that you visit twice—once in its pristine grandeur, and later as a decayed ruin.

9 TOMB RAIDER 2
Eidos Interactive 11/97

Even now, months after its release, Tomb Raider is unquestionably one hell of a game. Eidos Interactive's first major hit exploded genre conventions, giving gamers an experience that took the best qualities of action games (quick moves, ruthless enemies, wonderfully dangerous environments) and worked them into a truly mind-bending adventure. Of course, having control of a beautiful heroine didn't hurt matters any.

In that respect, things won't change much with Tomb Raider 2. Once again, gamers will guide freelance adventurer Lara Croft in her quest for a much-coveted artifact (in this case, the Dagger of Xian), and the game engine is largely the same, albeit with a few refinements, such as real-time, dynamic lighting. But while Tomb 2 may not feature completely revamped gameplay, what we've seen of it looks spectacular, stretching the original game's capabilities to their fullest. Among the new levels is one that drops Lara in the heart of Venice, fighting it out with multiple tuxedo-wearing assassins and some stunningly realistic guard dogs. Those aren't her only enemies: She'll also have to deal with a fanatical cult that wants the Dagger for its own purposes, as well as with other ruthless characters. To cope with it all, she'll have new moves—crawling, climbing, wading through water—and some new weapons, including flares and an underwater harpoon.


Lara goes to Venice—and the action explodes.

10 TRESPASSER
DreamWorks 12/97

If you haven't had enough of dinosaurs after *The Lost World*, DreamWorks aims to fix that with Trespasser, the "digital sequel" to the box-office smash. Of course, as in the movies, you'll end up fighting the big creatures, and you'll find they sport startlingly real physics and excellent graphical modeling. Your aim is to escape "Site B," where the dinos are on the loose. Escape means solving some puzzles, dealing with the intricacies of the island's realistic ecosystem, and doing battle where necessary. We'll see if it makes it out this year, but Trespasser should prove formidable whenever it hits shelves.

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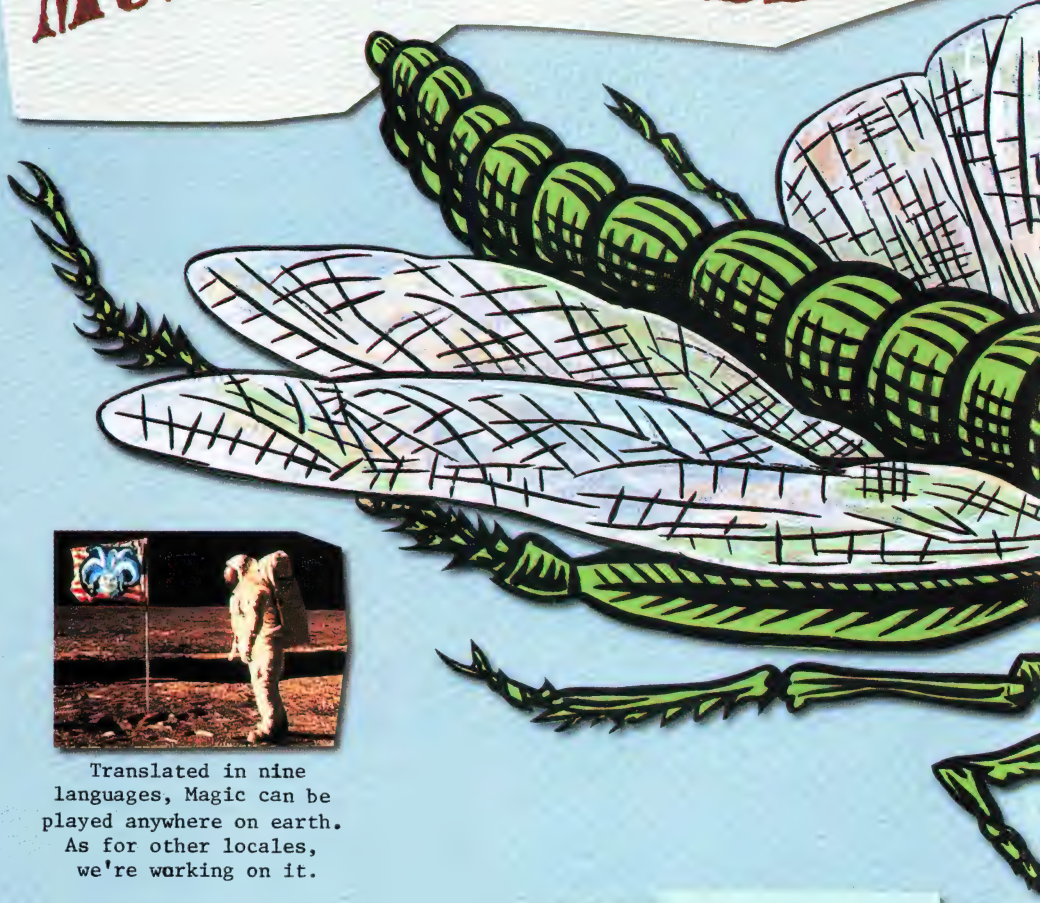

Translated in nine languages, Magic can be played anywhere on earth. As for other locales, we're working on it.

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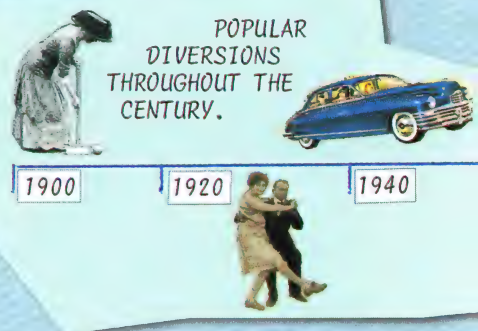

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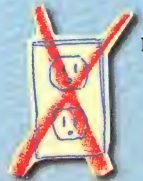
Each Magic card features artwork so vivid, you may actually feel its power. This is not always a good thing.



Magic gets its power from a simple deck of cards. And another often neglected source: your brain.

MAGIC The Gathering

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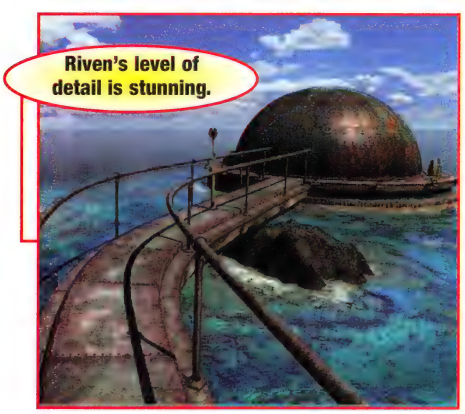
This Trespasser dude is looking for hors d'oeuvres.

11 RIVEN
Red Orb Entertainment 10/97

For months now, we've been hearing the hype about the sequel to Myst—it'll be beautiful, it'll be deeper, it'll be even more immersive. Well, Riven looks like it may deliver on all those counts. It's absolutely gorgeous, with superbly detailed 3D environments; you'll see such finely done graphics as trees with every leaf drawn. Although developer Cyan is still hard at work on the gameplay, figure on nearly double the play, with a quest picking up where Atrus left off at the end of Myst. You'll travel to better-defined worlds than the mysterious "Where am I?" island at Myst's beginning. The quest and art are enough to generate four CDs, says publisher Red Orb. Best of all, in this world of beefy games, Riven is designed to play on a P75—possibly even a 486DX2/66. Don't throw out that old computer just yet.



Riven's level of detail is stunning.

12 TOTAL ANNIHILATION
GT Interactive 10/97

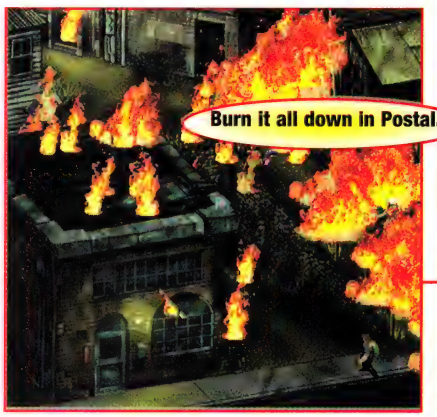
Total Annihilation offers fast action in a highly detailed real-time environment.

A battle to the death between two warring factions is nothing new, especially when it's packaged in real-time strategy duds. But Cavedog Entertainment's take on this popular genre appears to bundle in one convenient package all the features that fans want.

Approximately 150 unit types will be available between the two sides, each with a complement of land, sea, and air options. These will be enhanced by regular updates, on Cavedog's Web site, of new units to plug in. Detailed graphics on the units and varying terrain types (including forest, snow, metal worlds, islands, and more) are backed by a rousing soundtrack scored by the Seattle Symphony.

Cavedog has really paid attention to the AI, allowing waypoint paths to be saved and used later, units to move and fire at the same time, and multiplayer allies to share resources and information. Many user-customization elements have also been incorporated in the interface and gameplay, and players packing 32MB of RAM will benefit from the option of playing out more extensive conflicts on expanded battlefields.

13 POSTAL
Ripcord Games 11/97



Burn it all down in Postal.

We've all had days like this: the whole world against us, a whirlwind conspiracy threatening to swallow us whole. Haven't you ever just wanted to cut loose? That's the idea behind Postal, an ultraviolent, Crusader: No Remorse–ish shoot-'em-up by newcomer Ripcord Games. As fans of Woo and Tarantino, we love the premise: You're a small-town psychopath, unemployed, future bleak. You're already simmering, ready to boil, when the bank moves in and repossesses your trailer home...and you go Postal!

Storming 17 gorgeous hand-painted environments in search of "the truth," you'll use Molotov cocktails, Bouncing Betties, heat-seeking missiles, remote-controlled mines, and other devastating weapons to basically slaughter everyone you encounter—pedestrians, police officers, members of a local marching band, you name it. All the while, the slam-bang storyline will be propelled forward by voiceover dialogue, newspaper clippings, media reports, and a first-person diary, giving added depth to your conspiracy quest—they *are* out to get you, you know. (Well, aren't they always?)

Postal will also sport a built-in game editor, so you can concoct your very own twisted scenarios. Either way, the action should be relentless. We think you're going to like it—unless, of course, you're already one of "them."

14 THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT 3

Red Orb Entertainment 10/97

Adventure plus sequel doesn't necessarily equal Myst/Riven. Red Orb (the game publisher you've known as Brøderbund) is also offering up The Journeyman Project 3, and once again, they've tapped a rich vein of beautiful environments and intricate storyline. Time-traveling agent Gage Blackwood returns, this time on the trail of the duplicitous Agent 3, the turncoat baddie from Buried in Time. That quest would be a full game in itself, but when you nail Agent 3, you're sent on an even longer journey all over the Civilizations of Mankind. With all the plots within plots, there's plenty of opportunity for developers Presto Studios to screw up the time-travel intricacies, but the storyline—so central to the Journeyman games—remains amazingly coherent. You'll know a lot about the world by the time you finish, and the eye candy won't have been too hard to take, either.

Journeyman 3's time travel has you sailing a trireme.

15 WING COMMANDER PROPHECY

Origin 12/97

A new trilogy kicks into life with Prophecy, as this stunning space opera twists in a new direction but still retains plenty of links to ensure that Wing Commander's following enjoys some continuity. Mark Hamill and Tom Wilson make return appearances in the FMV set-filmed scenes, which

Superbly rendered cut scenes play a role in exploring the story of Prophecy.

are scheduled to flow more seamlessly with the gameplay elements than in earlier outings.

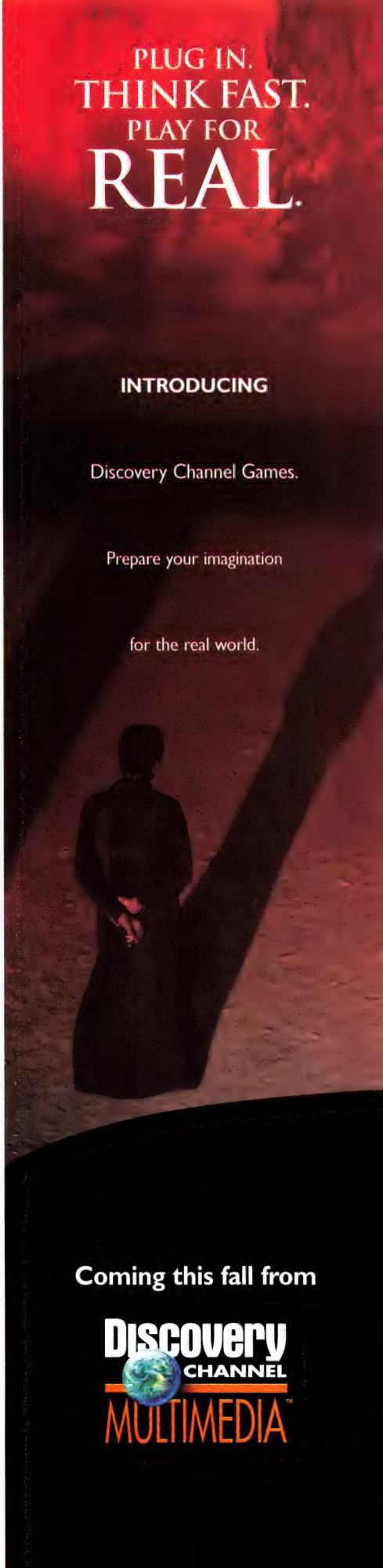
But it's a new direction for the storyline, and these old characters have advanced in the ranks to spearhead the forces, while you begin to make an impact of your own in the universe. Brand-new ships and enhanced flight models, along with an all-new alien threat, are some of the elements destined to attract old and new space pilots to the cause.

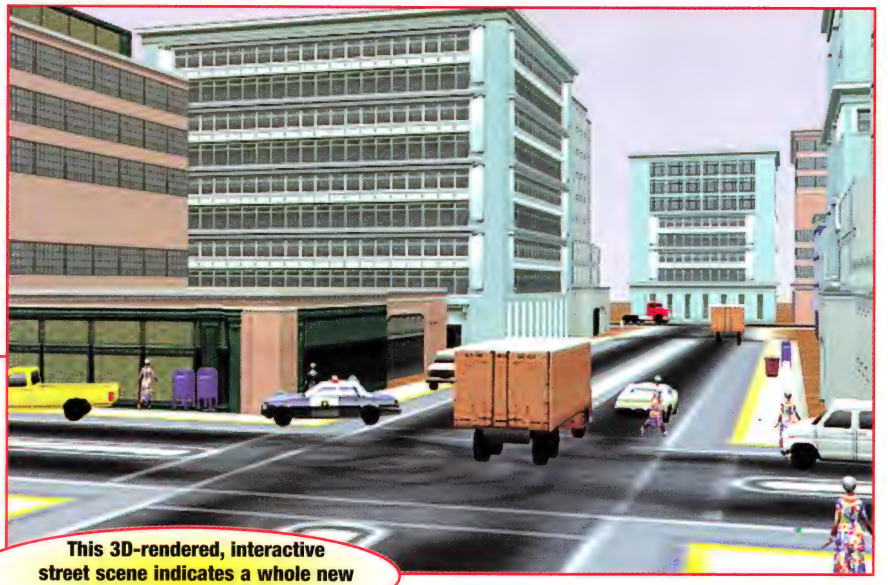
Strategy and dogfighting tactics should play a significant role in the varied missions, which are being carefully designed to offer new challenges. With such a prominent tradition of gaming quality in Wing III and IV, this new direction is going to be under great scrutiny. The important introduction of multiplay will be a key feature, and has the potential to widen the appeal of the Wing Commander universe still further.

16 SIMCITY 3000

Maxis 10/97

Few games have addicted so many as the SimCity series. Maxis plans to up the ante on the city-building experience with a fully 3D environment in SimCity 3000. Players can examine the city from any camera point, whether at street level or cruising altitude. The emphasis has been shifted away from menu-diving into a more visually interactive experience. You'll know a neighborhood is in trouble when trash and graffiti start piling up. You'll be able to query citizens as they move about the city and find out what's on their minds. If the task of being Da Mayor seems too large (though high customizability would seem to preclude this), you can take over a smaller agency like the police department, hospital, or fire crew (or tax collection service, if that's your thing) and run it while the rest of the city is handled by computer AI. As a





This 3D-rendered, interactive street scene indicates a whole new direction for SimCity 3000.

final tweak, Maxis is working on securing real-world licenses for many of the game's businesses, so don't be surprised to find a Barnes & Noble or Burger King around the corner.

17 DARK REIGN

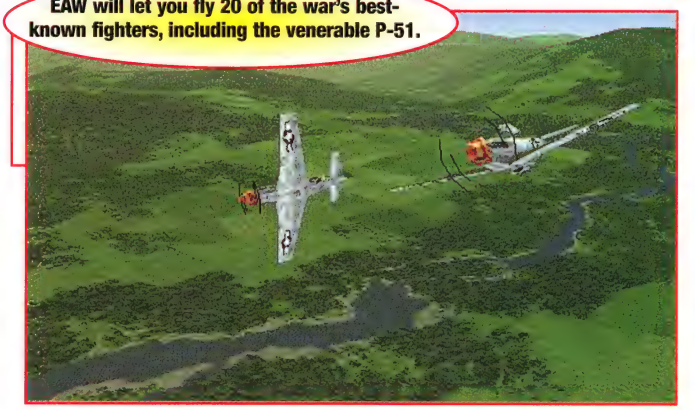
Activision 9/97

The first part of Dark Reign that we saw involved huge CGI animations blazing from nine giant display monitors—clean, crisp, animated cut scenes. The rest was pretty cool, too: strategy fans are likely to eat this one right up. The game looks sharp, with superb textures and remarkably realistic terrain. The new groundbreaking troop AI allows you to assign your units certain real-time attitudes. They can now be set to take an aggressive approach, or maybe even a careful conservative approach, giving missions many more angles of attack. Now your patrol party can use more passive guerrilla tactics, like waiting for the perfect shot before charging in blindly without any sense of AI. The look was familiar—it'll be easy to learn—but enticing. We can hardly wait.

The Imperium and the Freedom Guard have it out in Dark Reign.

18 1943: EUROPEAN AIR WAR

MicroProse 11/97



EAW will let you fly 20 of the war's best-known fighters, including the venerable P-51.

The follow-up to one of the best-known and loved flight sims ever, 1943: European Air War has a lot of pressure on it to deliver the goods. Its predecessor, 1942: Pacific Air War (known affectionately as PAW to its fans), still enjoys a healthy following years after its release, despite its dated look.

Thankfully, EAW looks like it will live up to the sophistication and flexibility of its forebear. This robust sim offers 20 different aircraft to fly and career options for the British, German, and American air forces in the skies over war-torn Europe, including a short career from both the German and British perspectives in the Battle of Britain. Missions will be based on actual historic events, and there will, of course, be an option to just jump in the cockpit for a good old-fashioned furball.

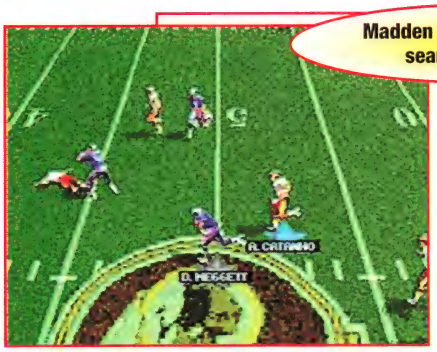
PAW vets will be happy to know the game will include an update of MicroProse's excellent virtual-cockpit technology, which allows you to quickly scan the skies from the cockpit in an extremely realistic manner. A nifty cinematic replay feature will let you review your missions from any perspective in the game world. This one sounds great! But don't be surprised if it slips to early next year.

19 STARCRAFT

Blizzard 10/97

It's been a whole year since the world first saw Starcraft at E3 '96, and it was on our top five list of things to check up on this year. Our look didn't disappoint. It's hard not to be impressed with the graphics quality for which Blizzard is so famous, and Starcraft is no exception. Monstrous alien flight carriers launch dozens of tiny intercept craft, while mechanized Terran units retreat from an airborne onslaught. The ships look out of this world, with plasma clouds trailing the propulsion devices. The Protoss, an alien race from several dimensions away, use shields that crackle and explode in real-time, depending on which side of the craft is struck. The clarity of each troop is highlighted with hi-res graphic art that will make most artistic types tremble. We haven't yet viewed much of the AI, but from what we've seen, Starcraft should be well worth the price of admission.

Terrans dodge a clever ambush in Starcraft.



Madden 98's quality translates seamlessly to the PC.

20 MADDEN NFL 98

Electronic Arts 10/97

A perennial favorite on the consoles for years, Madden NFL's PC debut last year was something of a disappointment. It simply couldn't match the gameplay options of its console forebears, and in many ways it was a step backward for football on the PC. Well, that may all be about to change. EA is giving the game a complete overhaul, starting with the controls. Madden 98 will feature full support for multibutton joypads like the Gravis GrIP (it's about time!), which will go a long way toward matching the PlayStation version for arcade-style football fun. The AI is also being rehashed, and EA swears it will be much more realistic than ever before. For example, opposing defenses will react and switch formations to match your player substitutions and audibles. A more sophisticated playbook and editor, as well as a general manager option with player trades and a salary cap, are also on the way.

The icing on the cake is an Internet-play option that will let you coach head-to-head against a buddy (arcade play won't be supported over the Net), and compete in some serious Madden league play. Oh yeah: Like last year, Madden himself will be there to help you learn the football basics in Madden University—an added bonus.

21 PANZER GENERAL II

SSI 9/97

One of the most popular and influential wargames of recent years is getting a long-awaited revamp. Panzer General II promises to take a stand for turn-based wargaming. Few strategy games, real-time or turn-based, have come near the Panzer General experience, and SSI is counting on this sequel to re-establish the series as the preeminent turn-based game on the market. Fighting takes place on Western and Eastern European fronts, with forays into North Africa and even the United States. You fight on hand-rendered maps, accurately drawn from the actual locations. The 3D-rendered units face in any of the six hex directions, and terrain reflects damage.

New campaigns and scenarios send you into action in Leningrad, Tobruk, and Malta, among other locations, with a few cases in which you can play as the Allies. But the best addition in Panzer General II is a battle editor that grants you full control over unit data, allowing for potentially endless battle generation. PG II will support four-way multiplay over LAN and the Internet, with the usual play-by-email option.

3D-rendered units duke it out on sumptuous hand-rendered maps.

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A graphic-adventure departure for the Warcraft universe.

22 WARCRAFT ADVENTURES: LORD OF THE CLANS

Blizzard 12/97

Even the newest of newbies, and the most secluded hardcores, have heard of the wonders of the Warcraft series. These strategy games delivered gameplay that forever raised expectations, not just for the genre, but for all computer games. Orcs and humans fought in a world of luscious graphics, superb AI, and delightfully challenging scenarios.

The tale will continue this Christmas in the form of Warcraft Adventures, a fantasy adventure game that returns players to the realm of Azeroth. As Thrall, a young Orc who's been raised as a virtual slave by humans, you'll embark on a journey of self-discovery, with the goal of reuniting and leading the scattered Orcish clans. It's quite a departure from Warcraft's strategy roots, but Lord of the Clans will offer you the chance to interact firsthand with members of the Orcish Horde, learning much about the creatures' history and motivations. Strange new situations will require unusual solutions, like disguising yourself as a dwarf to gain a secret object.

23 HEAVY GEAR

Activision 9/97

Like most gamers, we were a little depressed when we heard Activision had lost the license to FASA's Battletech universe; the company had exploited that property to its fullest potential in MechWarrior 2 and Mercenaries. Activision, however, was quick to step up to the plate with the rights to the Heavy Gear RPG universe, and with the same Mech design team behind the forthcoming Heavy Gear, things are once again looking rosy for mechanized combat.

You pilot various mechanized construction robots called Gears in a tumultuous civil war on the planet Terra Nova. You'll find the Gears are more nimble on their robotic feet than Mechs—able to sidestep, duck, and crouch, thanks to improved animation. The ability to pick up and use new weapons on the high-tech battlefield will add to the fun. The terrain is also more detailed this time around, and your senses will be assaulted by more special effects, including 3D sound. Best of all, Activision is going to great efforts to beef up the game's story and character components, which were the major shortcomings of the MechWarrior games.

Heavy Gear will support D3D out of the box to provide cool visual effects.

24 EARTHSIEGE 3

Sierra On-Line 11/97

EarthSiege 2 was the only mechanized combat game to give MechWarrior 2 a run for its money. Not only did EarthSiege compete with MW2, it bested it in the special-effects category. Sierra and Dynamix are looking to up the ante once again with EarthSiege 3, which looks phenomenal. The game will feature rolling 3D terrain with amazing visible range, as well as a wide variety of lighting and explosion effects that have to be seen to be believed. Three-dimensional sound effects round out EarthSiege 3's impressive technical résumé.

You can fight for any one of three sides—Corporate, Cybrid, or Rebel—in The Future Wars, in a series of more than 45 missions with multiple objectives. In addition to the traditional Hercs, you'll have scout vehicles, tanks, and hovercraft at your disposal. You'll also be able to configure the vehicles, and you'll be able to generate your own multiplayer missions.

EarthSiege 3 has a uniquely sophisticated sci-fi look.

25 ZORK: GRAND INQUISITOR

Activision 8/97

Okay, Zork traditionalists: Activision heard you when you claimed passionately that Zork: Nemesis wasn't really Zork at all. Not that Nemesis wasn't a fine example of Gothic suspense, but it wasn't the comic and playful Zork universe relating back to the original DOS text-adventure. So, be happy—Zork: Grand Inquisitor returns the franchise to its roots.

In Grand Inquisitor, Zork returns to a more playful universe.

Activision is being somewhat hush-hush about the plot, although there is a lot of religious whatnot in evidence, as well as an all-expenses-paid trip to Hades. What we do know for sure is that a lot of effort has been put into making the whole experience fun and offbeat. Unfortunately, that also means Grand Inquisitor won't look as gorgeous as Nemesis. Then again, you Zorkheads didn't much care about such refined aesthetics anyway.

26 NHL 98

Electronic Arts 9/97

Some new coaching features will help make NHL 98 an even more realistic hockey sim.

EA Sports has more or less owned hockey games on the PC, and with the look we got at NHL 98, there's nothing to suggest that that's going to change. Believe it or not, the graphics have been improved over last year's, with remarkably lifelike player animations—even down to the shuffling while waiting for the puck to drop at the faceoff. Goalie moves are captured from John Vanbiesbrouck and help make the keeper as dynamic-looking as ever.

But the real overhaul has come in the sim department. NHL 98 attempts to bring a more realistic experience to hockey by incorporating a coaching menu that lets you tailor your offensive and defensive strategies to your liking. Teams are modeled after their real-life counterparts, so you can expect the Penguins to attack you with a wide-open style, while the Panthers will suffocate you with a smothering neutral-zone trap. This should be the most eye-pleasing, fan-pleasing installment yet in this venerable sports series.

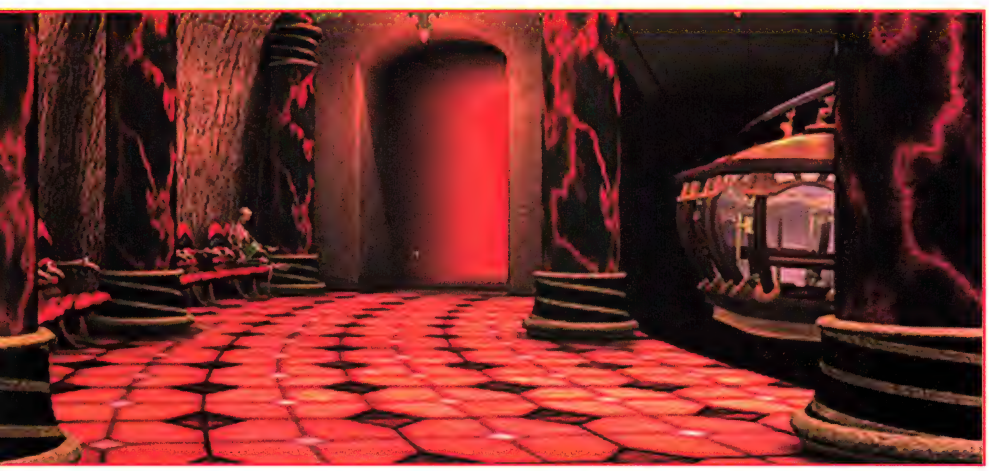
27 MESSIAH

Interplay 12/97

The world's an evil place, right? Full of drug lords, gangsters, pimps, and hookers? Of course it is. It needs cleaning up. Nothing unusual here...until you realize that the eponymous Messiah happens to be a cherubic angel, complete with diaper, wings, and typical angelic chubbiness. But this is one angel the bad guys aren't going to push around. That's not because he packs an arsenal of explosive weaponry—that wouldn't be very angelic, would it? Rather, he can possess these nefarious creatures and use their abilities to do the dirty work without getting his own hands dirty. Cunning.

MDK developer Shiny has motion-captured characters in extraordinary detail and animated them with a fluidness that's truly lifelike. It's also devised an incredibly complex engine to give smooth edges to the high polygon count that makes up the figures, and to model the captured information down to the slightest nuance of movement. We're intrigued.

The Messiah prepares to launch at that, er, dancer.



EVOLVE OR DIE

Evolution
THE GAME OF INTELLIGENT LIFE

A Darwinian strategy game where you either get smart... or go extinct.

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evolution.discovery.com

AND EVEN MORE...

How to keep up with all of the titles? This list offers a little help making those tough choices.

ACHTUNG, SPITFIRE
A flight sim that uses the fantastic Over the Reich engine to bring you air battles over WWII Europe from the Nazi perspective. (Avalon Hill)

AGE OF EMPIRES
As real-time strategy games go, this is one of the more novel and interesting titles to arrive this fall. With beautiful animations and attention to ancient historical flourishes, Age of Empires should find a following. (Ensemble/Microsoft)

BLACK DAHLIA
The legendary 1940s murder has inspired a noir-ish adventure in which you walk through stunningly rendered 1940s Los Angeles on the trail of an insidious evil. (Take 2 Interactive)

CHROMAFORM
An odd real-time strategy game that gives you command of a strange assortment of creatures in a visually intuitive battleground. (Maxis)

CONSTRUCTOR
Billed as "SimCity meets C&C, with a touch of Monty Python," this sim/strategy game lets players build and rule a city with real-world obstacles, policies, and challenges. (Acclaim)

CROC
If this Mario 64 takeoff lives up to what we've seen so far, Croc's powerhouse graphics and absorbing gameplay should make it a winner. Run, jump, climb, and swim your way through more than 50 exotic, playful environments, as you search for the crystals that will free your friends. (Fox Interactive)

D-DAY 1999
Adolf Hitler time-travels forward for weapons that'll change the balance of WWII power; it's your task to go back and take him on in this first-person-perspective combat actioner. (Playmates/New Wave Entertainment)

DARK EARTH
The long-awaited epic adventure game offers a huge, fully realized fantasy world where you must save your city from dark clouds converging on a near-sunless future Earth. (Kalisto)

DEFIANCE
An unexpected offering: This looks to be the title that breaks Avalon Hill out of its wargaming-only focus. You pilot a futuristic attack craft against an alien invader who has interrupted your training mission. (Cryo Interactive)

DREAMS
Third-person action/adventure in a world of Dreams allows the artistic talents of these French designers to run riot. Aiming to combine Mario 64's atmosphere, Tomb Raider's environment, and Diablo's magic, it'll feature 100 locations crammed onto two CDs. (Cryo Interactive)

EVOLUTION
Real-time strategy with a twist: you start at the beginning of time. Control species from the ground up as you fashion a world, literally creating civilization. (Discovery Channel Multimedia)

G-POLICE
Pure action is the name of the game as geodesic futuristic cities are policed from the seat of a fully-armed helicopter. Seven cities encompass 35 missions that follow plot twists to a final, explosive confrontation. (Psygnosis)

GEX: ENTER THE GECKO
More adventures with the wise-ass lizard, once again voiced by comedian Dana Gould. Wonderfully rendered levels include trips back through time and a hilarious metamorphosis into a 50-foot Gexzilla. (Crystal Dynamics)

THE GOLF PRO
A departure from the three-click control; this time you swing the mouse to hit straight, hooks, and fades. Gary Player supplies the official stamp with tips on how to navigate the two planned courses. (Empire Interactive)

GUARDIANS: ANGELS OF JUSTICE
Play as one of 14 superhero characters or create your own in this turn-based action/strategy game. Thanks to a new engine (not connected to the familiar X-COM), there are over 80 different powers and abilities to be used against a range of evil superpowers. (MicroProse)

HARDCORE 2
This driving game drops you onto some of the bumpiest courses you could hope to master. A must for force-feedback addicts. You may just find this coming to arcades, too. (ASC)

INCUBATION
A cousin to the popular Battle Isle series, this turn-based strategy game deals with the threat of alien forces in a mission-based tactical battle. Role-playing elements let you develop your forces' equipment and abilities to help take on the aggressive aliens. (Blue Byte)

INTERVENTION
A turn-based God game in which you create worlds and gain power through the adoration of your followers. It's hardcore strategy with intensive resource management. Over Cryo's own Internet server, a time limit will ensure that time passes smoothly through the eras of gameplay. (Cryo Interactive)

JAGGED ALLIANCE 2
Improved graphics, 50 new characters, the ability to customize your own mercenaries, new dialogue, and night and indoor missions are just a few of the enhancements to this popular strategy game. (Sir-tech)

JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER
A new flight sim on the way that models two aircraft not due for military service until well after the turn of the millennium: the super-secret Boeing X-32 and Lockheed Martin X-35. JSF promises to be one of the most ambitious flight sims ever, modeling more than 10 million square miles of terrain. (Eidos Interactive/Interloop)

NIGHTFALL
This one offers a few unique twists on the action/shooter genre. You play a terraformer fighting an alien threat, and you can't just kill the baddies—you have to terraform the planet while you're at it. (Maxis)

OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS
Artist Gil Bruvel brings his fantastic visions to this adventure game, which turns a simple rescue mission into a race to save humanity. Ten endings, and Internet links that yield important info, add to the innovation level. (Interplay)

RAYMAN GOLD: THE MAP DESIGN STUDIO
Steady, sidescrolling fans: The Rayman Gold map editor will let you create your own levels for the popular game. This sequel includes 17 maps from the original game and 24 new maps, complete with new obstacles and an all-new move, the "platform punch." (Ubi Soft)

REDJACK
This old-fashioned adventure game uses a very painterly environment to place you on the high seas as a young man looking to come of age among the brigands of the Caribbean. Fans of Titanic and Dust will find more innovations to the classic Cyberflix style. (Cyberflix)

SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG
The Master of Civilization takes on the decisive battle of the Civil War, letting you experience The Stand of the Iron Brigade or Pickett's Charge. A scenario editor will also let you play "what if" in the battlefield's familiar layout. (Electronic Arts)

STAR TREK: THE SECRET OF VULCAN'S FURY
A top-notch exploration based on the original TV series and cast, with the original uniforms/technology (not those in the movies). The Interplay guys have been working over a year to model the faces of the original cast correctly, working from videotape. (Interplay)

SUB CULTURE
Environmental concerns abound for the miniaturized population of an undersea world. Recycle waste and fight off fish and corporate raiders in a first-person action game with a strategic edge. (Criterion Studios)

TEMÜJIN: THE CAPRICORN COLLECTION
A video-based, 360-degree thriller that has you hunting through the Stevenson Museum for the secrets of Genghis Khan. (SouthPeak Interactive)

TEST DRIVE 4
Take 10 of the world's most exotic cars for a spin around 6 authentically detailed locations. From the modern power of the '98 Dodge Viper to the classic style of the '67 Shelby Cobra, each car will handle with its own characteristics. (Accolade)

TUROK: DINOSAUR HUNTER
The much-hyped N64 shoot-'em-up gets ported to the PC. No plans to add multiplay, but the expansive first-person game will gain new textures designed specifically for 3Dfx cards. (Acclaim)

UBIK
Based on a Philip K. Dick story. You control a squad of 5 characters selected from 60 options. Role-playing elements come through in the ability to swap equipment between characters during tactical combat phases. Fought in 3D-rotated environments, they'll bring the futuristic New York setting to life. (Cryo Interactive)

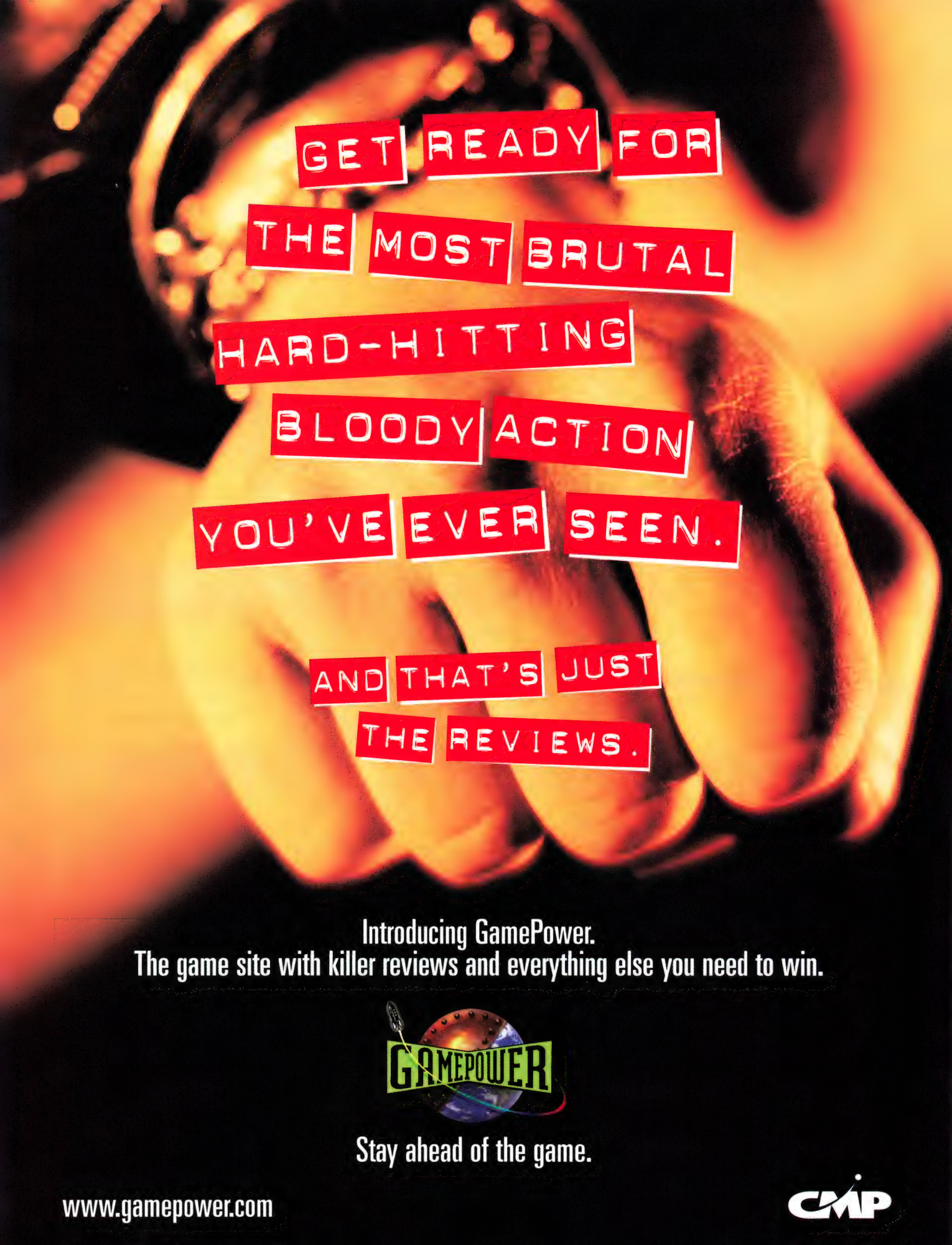
VIRTUA SQUAD 2
Like the first Virtua Squad, this port of Virtua Cop 2 will offer plenty of first-person firepower as you take down criminals on a frenetic urban battleground. Follow the roving camera into several all-new locales, including a deadly subway scene. (Sega Entertainment)

VIRUS
An action-based strategy game that uses your own system files to construct a computer invaded by a deadly virus. It's a race against time, partly using a first-person engine, to flush out the virus and save your virtual files. (Sir-tech)

WARGAMES
Everyone remembers Matthew Broderick's struggles against the WOPR computer in *WarGames*. Now there'll be a real-time strategy game featuring a 3D battle against the WOPR, which is intent on starting nuclear war. (MGM Interactive)

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK TELEVISION
An obvious entry in a franchise that's pushing 1 million in sales, this Jack's nonetheless chockfull of the usual smart-aleck queries about the medium that best deserves such treatment. (Berkeley Systems)

YOUNGBLOOD
Based on the comic-book characters, this Diablo-clone sets you on an action-based RPG adventure against the evil Dr. Leviticus. Playing from two to four of the heroes, you use their superpowers to live in this world. (GT Interactive)



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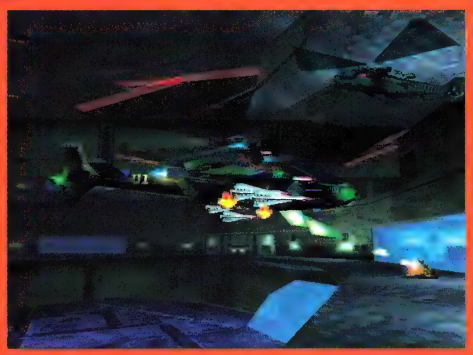

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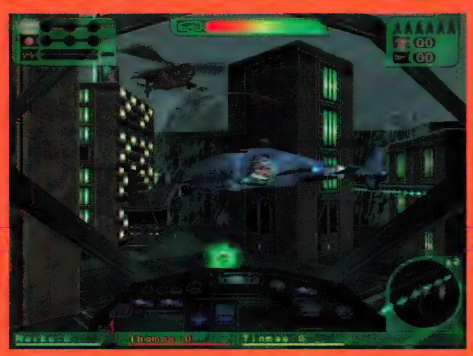

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By Steve Klett
DAI
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KATANA

Ion Storm's debut title is a first-person action game based on the Quake engine. PC Games goes to the source—John Romero himself—to get the lowdown on this highly anticipated title and how it may elevate the standards for the genre.

Poised high above its neighbors in the glass-encased top floor of one of the tallest buildings around, Ion Storm is quite literally sitting on top of the world—or, at the very least, the city of Dallas.

Infused with the energy and enthusiasm that comes with starting a new company, Ion Storm is ready to make some waves by offering some truly groundbreaking gameplay. Over the coming months, these charismatic and talented game designers may well forever alter expectations of what a game can be.

Why such lofty expectations? Well, Ion Storm's roll call reads like a mini game-design Hall of Fame, with names such as John Romero (who helped create a little game called Doom) and Tom Hall (id co-founder and ex-Apogee/3D Realms member). These guys have proved they know how to make great games, so it's natural for us as gamers to assume they'll continue to do so. In fact, we're so greedy, we expect their next games to be even better than their last ones.

Ordinarily, this might put a lot of pressure on a company, but Ion Storm is no ordinary business. If Romero is feeling pressured to create the greatest first-person action game ever—a game that really demonstrates that as cool as Quake is, it could've been far cooler—it doesn't show.

In our interviews, Romero was cool, calm, focused, and, above all, confident. That confidence was mirrored by the rest of the team around him. Daikatana was still very much a work in progress, and the team was scrambling to get a demo ready to show off at E3. But what we saw and heard was still impressive.

THE GAME

Daikatana is a fast-paced first-person action game incorporating some role-playing elements. Ion Storm is using id's Unified Quake Technology engine for the game, so you already have a basic idea of how it will play. Like Quake, Daikatana will be composed of four episodes of seven levels each. However, Romero quickly cautions against assuming his game is going to be just like Quake.

"There are 25 people working on Daikatana, which is a good-sized team," says Romero. "I really wanted a bunch of people working to put out a really great game—not just a technology." This statement gets to the heart of why Romero left id to start Ion Storm—a story everyone knows by now. But what does it mean for the game?

Well, Daikatana may be similar to Quake in its basic structure, but that's where the similarity ends. For starters, Daikatana is backed by a strong story, which is unusual for a first-person action game—and which was essentially absent from the classics Doom and Quake. In fact, Romero points to games such as Outlaws (of which he's a big fan—check out his review on Ion Storm's Web site at **www.ionstorm.com**), Dark Forces, and even Duke Nukem 3D as the genre's leaders in this category.

Then there are your two friends—Mikiko and Superfly Johnson—who travel with you and watch your back...but more on them in a bit. Add to this the fact that you can expect different art for each of Daikatana's levels, a set of seven different weapons for each episode, twice the number of animation frames for the monsters and player characters than Quake, and a completely original soundtrack with a fresh tune for every level. If that doesn't have you Quake fans drooling in anticipation, you must be in a coma.

THE STORY

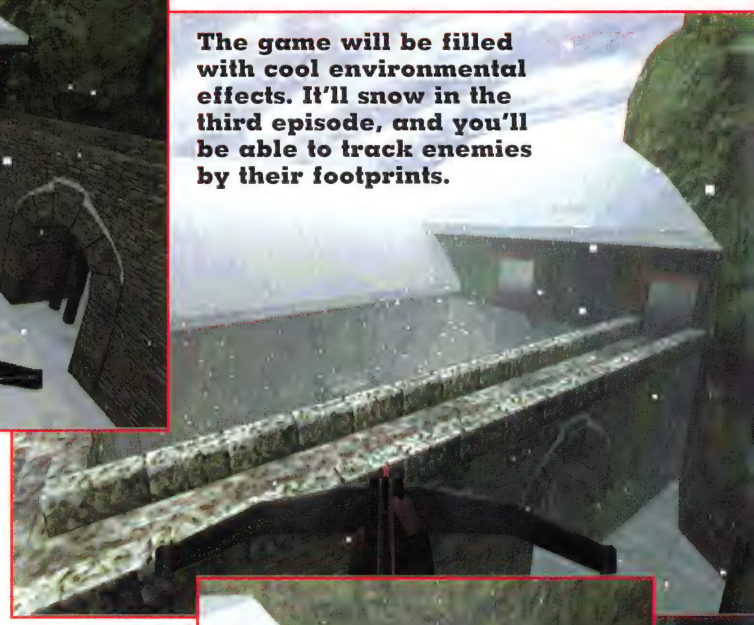
In the year 2455 A.D., a team of archaeologists working for a Dr. Toshiro Ibihara uncovers the mythical Daikatana—a magical sword said to imbue its wielder with the power to time travel. For years, Dr. Ibihara had financed a multi-million–dollar search for the sword, funded by profits from Tetsuo Ibihara, Toshiro's grandfather, who discovered a cure for AIDS in 2030 A.D.

Toshiro wants only to uncover the sword's magical secrets and travel through time to thank his ancestor. Unfortunately, his assistant, Dr. Jarred Benedict, has other ideas. He seizes the sword, slays his mentor, and goes back to 2030 A.D. to steal the AIDS cure and reap the financial benefits. Of course, you know you can't let Benedict get away with such treachery. (Think that name choice is coincidental? Neither do we.)

Back in the present, you are one Hiro Miyamoto, who happens to be an expert on Japanese history and—more importantly—warfare. One night, while studying in the library, you are approached by Toshiro's beautiful daughter Mikiko, who asks you to help her avenge her father's death and, of course, set history straight in the process. In return, you will receive riches beyond your wildest dreams, and that's an offer you simply cannot refuse.

THE EPISODES

You begin the first episode, set in 2455 A.D., in a swamp outside the massive fortress that Benedict built some 300 years ago (now occupied by his descendants) to house the Daikatana and prevent its theft. Of course, your path to the sword is filled with obstacles such as traps and Benedict's robotic minions, who are focused on one thing—killing you. With Mikiko's help, you must overcome the obstacles to retrieve the sword. Along the way, you will pick up a new friend, Superfly Johnson, who agrees to help you right Benedict's wrongs.



The game will be filled with cool environmental effects. It'll snow in the third episode, and you'll be able to track enemies by their footprints.

The second episode takes place in ancient Greece, after Hiro tries to use the sword to return to 2030 A.D. and arrives in 2030 B.C. instead—Dóh! You'll discover that the inhabitants of ancient Greece don't take kindly to visitors from the future, and you'll have to battle your way through many mythical locations (such as the catacombs of Athens and the Parthenon), defeating classic enemies (such as Medusa and the Minotaur) to gain enough power to use the sword for time travel.

Once again, you attempt to reach the year 2030 A.D., and once again you discover the sword doesn't have enough power to get you all the way there. Instead, you are dropped into the dark ages—Norway 560 A.D.—where most of your adventure will take place in the massive castle of one King Gharroth. Only after you beat Gharroth's four sorcerers and the king himself will the Daikatana gain enough power to get you to the year 2030 A.D.

And at this point, your journey's still not over. You arrive in San Francisco—in a small prison cell in Alcatraz! You quickly discover the Rock is no longer a tourist attraction, but is once again a receptacle for hard-bitten criminals placed there by other criminals. San Francisco has been rocked by a massive earthquake, and chaos rules supreme. You'll need to fight your way to the mainland, then find and defeat Benedict mano-a-mano before he can steal the AIDS cure and change the course of history.

THE GOODIES

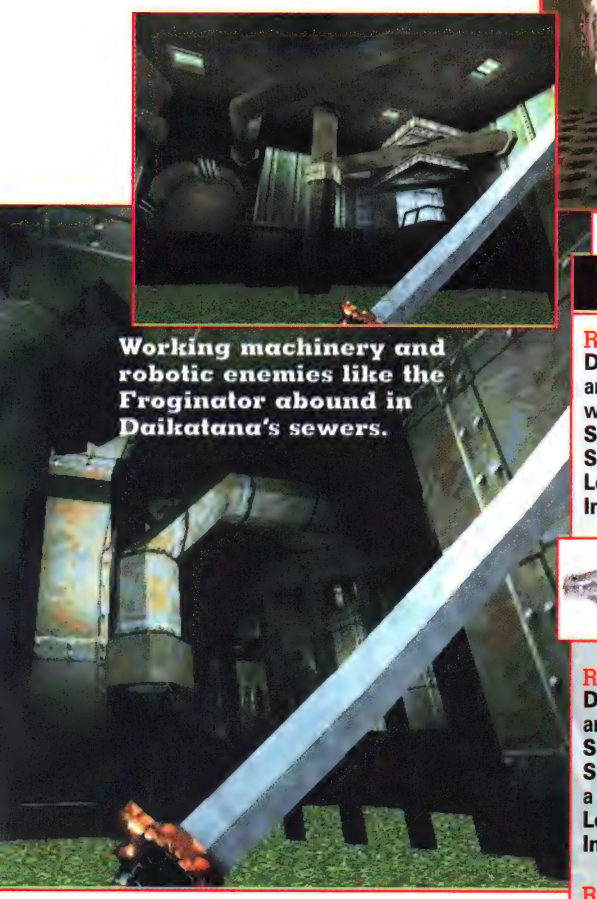
Each of Daikatana's episodes has seven levels, and there are 64 different monster types planned for the final game, as well as 35 different weapons and 32 music tracks. Romero and team are going all-out to avoid the been-there/done-that feeling you get after the first episode or two in single-player Quake. As much as he enjoys a good old-fashioned deathmatch, Romero says that "the single-player game experience is very important, and is where most of our effort is focused."

By giving each level a distinct look and feel and steadily introducing new baddies, weapons, and power-ups, Romero hopes to keep players' sense of discovery at the highest possible level. "We want

people to know who they are in the game and why they're there, and to want to finish the game," he says. Romero is even toying with the idea of allowing players to play through the game again as Superfly and Mikiko, if there's time to create the feature before the tentative December ship date.

You'll also see different power-ups in each episode—speed bursts, jump boosts, health, etc.—and seven different weapons per episode, "the last of which is always a type of BFG," says Romero. Best of all, you get to keep all the different weapons you find as you jump between episodes, so by the end of the game it's possible to have an arsenal of 28 weapons (see page 82 for some examples and **www.pcgames.com** for a more complete list). Add to that the Daikatana, which can be powered up to offer seven different kinds of magical attacks, and you've got a grand total of 35 means of destruction.

This also means you'll have to manage your ammo carefully, because while you may have a rocket launcher found in 2455 A.D. with you in 2030 B.C., you're not going to find any ammo for it lying around. Why not? The ancient Greeks didn't have rocket launchers, silly. So you're going to want to conserve your powerful ammo for duking it out with the many bosses and minibosses in each episode.



Working machinery and robotic enemies like the Froginator abound in Daikatana's sewers.

THE CHARACTERS

Why the choice of female and African-American sidekicks? "We thought it would be cool to have characters different from everything else people are used to seeing," says Romero.

Having three heroic characters will also enhance the game's story and role-playing elements. Mikiko will be more nimble on her feet than her cohorts and deadly with her staple weapon, a dagger; Superfly will have more endurance and strength and be good with melee weapons (his staple weapon is a set of brass knuckles); and Hiro will be the balanced fighter of the three. His charge is to master the Daikatana over the course of the game. To do that, Hiro will have to use the sword as much as possible to build its power and earn the sword's seven power-ups per episode.

All dialogue between the characters will be spoken; there will be no text, a conscious effort by Ion Storm to give the game more of an epic, movie-type feel. When you hit a crossroads in the game, Mikiko may say, "I want to go this way," or Superfly may suggest another course of action. You will have only two possible responses to their suggestions—yes or no—but your decisions will affect the ease or difficulty of your quest. Mikiko and Superfly will also work to trick your enemies.

Where the role-playing really comes into play is in experience points. Each character starts the game with a default setting for five basic attributes: Attack Power, Attack Speed, Constitution, Jumping, and Speed. When you go up a level, you'll get one point to distribute among these five attributes as you see fit; the max for each is 10.

MONSTERS OF DAIKATANA

RoboCo Crox

Description: Robotic swamp crocodile. Eyes are bright colors and sit just above the water when it swims
Size: Larger than man-size
Special Abilities: Swims
Location: E1M1
Intelligence: Low

Skeleton

Description: Sword-swinging undead
Size: Man-size
Special Abilities: Sword attack
Location: E2M1, E2M2, E2M4, E2M5, E2M8
Intelligence: Low

RoboCo LethalLick Froginator II

Description: Robotic frog that hops around and lashes you with its tongue
Size: 8 inches long
Special Abilities: Lashes tongue from a distance
Location: E1M1, E1M2
Intelligence: Low

Rocket Launcher Dude

Description: Heavy-duty gang member with a rocket launcher on one shoulder
Size: Man-size
Special Abilities: Stops, crouches, and fires a rocket
Location: E4M4
Intelligence: Average

Buboid

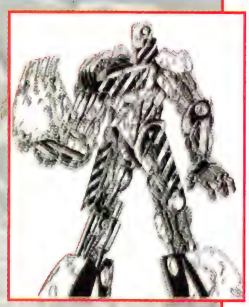
Description: Black Plague victim who wanders the streets, moaning
Size: Man-size
Special Abilities: Runs toward you and delivers a poison bite, knocking you down 20 health points over the course of 10 seconds
Location: E3M1, E3M2a, E3M2b, E3M2c
Intelligence: Average

Female Gang Member

Description: Similar to other gang members, except this one's "a pretty hot female wearing slutty gang attire"
Size: Man-size
Special Abilities: Dual knife attack; incredible acrobatic leaps and flips
Location: E4M3, E4M4
Intelligence: Average

RoboCo Sludge Minion

Description: A robot that tends to the sewers of the fortress, cleaning up sludge lumps
Size: Man-size
Special Abilities: Fires sludge balls
Location: E1M2, E1M3
Intelligence: Medium



WEAPONS DEPOT

Daikatana
Exclusive weapon of Hiro Miyamoto, the main character. This magical sword has a maximum of seven power levels attained only by vanquishing enough enemies with the sword.

Glock
Basic gun with 20 rounds per clip. It does minor damage but can also be used to pistol-whip enemies in a pinch.

C4 Vizatergo
Fires C4 plastic explosives that adhere to walls and can be detonated remotely—but when you blow one, they all go.

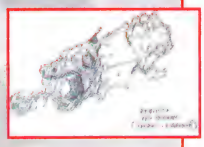
Discus of Daedalus
A bronze disc with a sharpened edge that you throw; it returns after a set amount of time. You can bounce it off walls.

Greek Fire
A clay pot with a fiery rag coming out the top. Throw it, and it explodes on impact.

Caduceus of Hermes:
A winged staff with two snakes entwined around it, their heads at the top. When you fire it, poisonous green balls blast out quickly and alternately from each head.

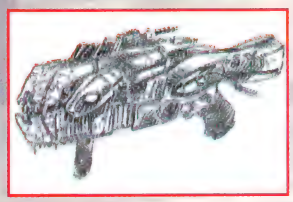
Hand of Zeus
A statue of Zeus that you hold in front of you. When fired, it emits multipronged lightning that hits everything you see.

Sabikiis' Red Dragon
A dragon head that shoots a very fast-moving fireball from its mouth. The fireball explodes on impact.



Nharre's Nightmare
An evil pentagram amulet that glows red when used. Everyone in your sight becomes paralyzed, and then a translucent demon blasts up out of the ground and blows their skin clean off. Their bones shiver for a second, then fall into a heap.

Tazerhook
Press and hold trigger to fire a hook into any solid object. Releasing the trigger then pulls you toward the object with the proper gravity effect, such as swinging. When fired into an enemy, the Tazerhook delivers a nasty shock.



Kineticore
A techy-looking iced-metal gun that shoots five steel balls at super-high velocity. The balls bounce off walls until they time out and dissipate.

Wraithorb
A ghostly face in a glass orb that makes you invisible for 60 seconds—but only if you don't move. If you move, you're only 20 percent translucent.

This will also give the game some replay value, as you can go back and try to beat it again, emphasizing different abilities.

What happens when you die? Well, if Mikiko or Superfly has a revive potion, you're in luck. If not... While you're dead, the game switches to a third-person perspective, and you watch Mikiko and Superfly try to help you; if they die, or if too much time passes before they can revive you, it's Game Over. As in Quake, you can save your game whenever and wherever you want.

THE INTELLIGENCE

Most of you would agree that Quake's monsters weren't the smartest polygonal baddies in the gaming world; they continually ran into walls and didn't know what to do, and they were quite easy to elude when necessary. This shouldn't be the case with the AI in Daikatana, "which will go far beyond anything in Quake," says Romero.

The enemy AI is based on a node system, meaning that everywhere you go in the game is mapped out—so the monsters know to follow you up stairs and around corners, for example. "You'll run through a twisty maze and find that the monsters will be able to follow you and hunt you down," Romero says. As in Quake, monsters will still fight one another (only different species of monsters will fight), and they will work together to try and surround you when possible.

"The only game that may come close to matching our AI is Unreal," Romero says confidently (see "Unreal," May/June 1997, page 72).

THE GAMEPLAY

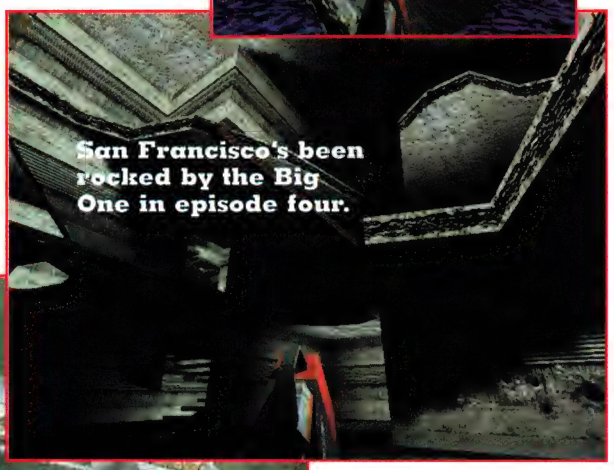
Because it's based on the Quake engine, Daikatana will have virtually the same play mechanics, with at least two notable additions. First, the game will include an optional "use" key. If you choose to enable it, you'll have to manually open and close doors and use items in your inventory—things that happen automatically in Quake. Ion Storm is also including a duck/crouch key that will be taken into account during play-balancing and level design.

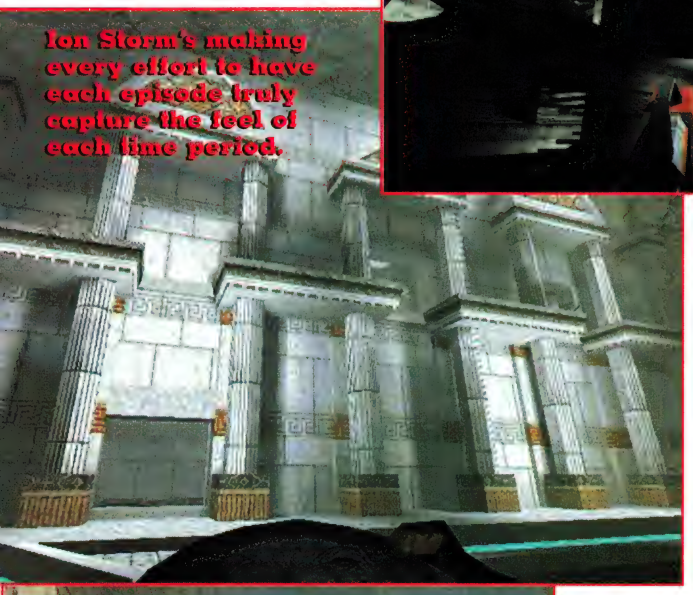
These may sound like minor tweaks, but when you consider they add two additional controls to master in the heat of battle, their gameplay influence is pretty major. An automap feature may also be included. It will show you everywhere you've been in a level—but reveal nothing else.

The amount of detail in the levels is staggering. Here are the Ancient Greece levels in episode two.

MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

Similarly, the multiplayer mechanics and options will largely mirror those of Quake/Quake 2—albeit with some fairly major additions. The biggest one by far will be the ability to play as any of the three characters in a deathmatch. If you're a bruiser who likes to go toe-to-toe until you frag or are fragged, tough-guy Superfly is the choice for you. If you like to hit and run, the fleet-footed Mikiko is your gal. If you're the all-around fighter type, stick with the main man, Hiro.





Also, you'll have the option to go one-on-one against a buddy with Mikiko and Superfly to help you out, resulting in a three-on-three battle with four of the characters controlled by the computer.

Ion Storm is also looking at tweaking the player-respawn process to ensure that when you respawn in a deathmatch, you appear in the safest possible place—that is, the spot with the fewest enemies nearby (take that, respawn campers!).

You can also expect to see around four deathmatch-only levels in the final game designed by Romero himself. (Romero loves the rocket jump, so expect areas you'll need to rocket jump to. It won't be necessary to jump to them, but if you do, you'll likely be rewarded.)

THE ARRIVAL

With its role-playing, variety, story, and character interaction, Daikatana's gameplay potential is enormous. Ion is planning to release the first episode of the game as shareware in mid-August, so it may be out as you read this. The full game is slated for December release, but don't be surprised if Romero holds it until it's perfect. Either way, we fully expect Daikatana to be well worth the wait. ■

Another of Ion Storm's eagerly awaited titles is Anachronix, an RPG that, in the words of team leader Tom Hall, "mixes Quake, Mario 64, Chronotrigger, Final Fantasy, and everything else you've ever wanted to see in a game." For an extensive interview with Hall and the rest of the Anachronix development team, visit our Web site, www.pcgames.com.

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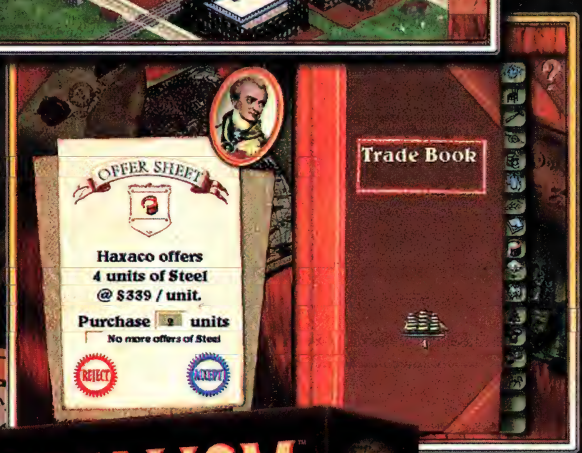

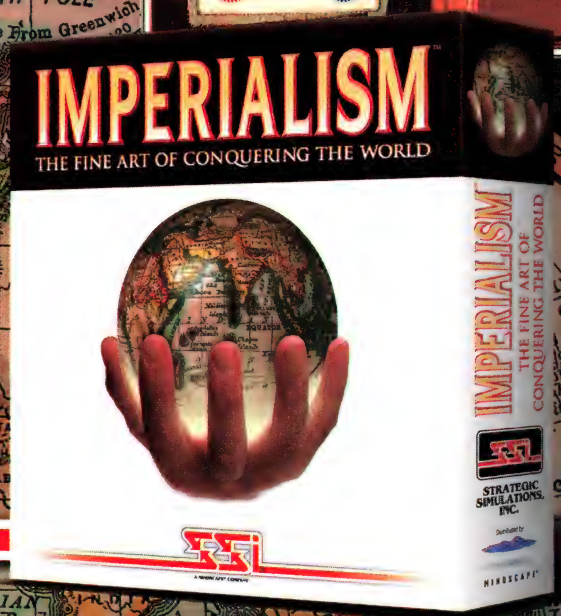

WINDOWS® 95 &
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For the Love of It

As more and more gamers go online—and stay online, for hours on end—the number of enthusiast gaming sites is exploding. Join us as we travel to some of the Web's most exciting gaming pages, created by you. **By Daniel Morris**

They work in solitude, or as members of globe-spanning guilds. They are men and women. They are action fans, strategy buffs, RPG addicts. But there's one thing they all have in common—they maintain standout Web sites devoted to the computer games they love, and nobody's paying them to do it.

The World Wide Web has brought thousands of amateur webmasters online to share their enthusiasm for gaming. Some sites are only the barest of rudimentary HTML uploads; others make mincemeat out of major game publishers' efforts. But no matter what level of proficiency they possess, the defining characteristic of Web enthusiasts is their eagerness to endure long hours, painstaking coding, and untold megs of disk space, all in the name of their hobby.

Cindy "Shebop" Iritsky is the webmaster for the Air Warrior Community site; she's representative of the type of committed gamers who are more than happy to dedicate their time and energy to their sites. "Not wanting to become a 'flight-sim widow,' I tried my hand at simulated flight," she writes. Shebop's AW group hopped from service to service until settling mostly on Delphi. "Without a doubt, the Air Warrior/flight-sim community is the greatest bunch of people I have ever known."

Bryan Fordney, whose humorous artistic embellishments of Diablo screenshots adorn his site, had very humble beginnings in mind for his page.

"I just loved making graphics and pictures, so I did what best fit me," Fordney says. He got the word out on his site with the search engines, and the response has been fantastic, with daily hits in the dozens. "I gets lots of email from people, some just like: 'Man, that's a great page,' or 'Here's my Diablo picture, please put it on your site!' It's just great."

Whether the purpose of a site is as big as organizing a sprawling community of flight-simmers or as simple as providing a fledgling Web artist with his first online gallery, gamers are demonstrating a remarkable vision for their pastime.

Even disillusionment gets a sparkling treatment on sites such as the Dragon Order guild's. They quit playing Meridian 59 after a squabble with 3DO, and now a section of the guild's site is devoted to a raging screed against the company. The site maintainer/guildmaster, Siren, is a woman with a lot to say and plenty of skill with which to voice her concerns.

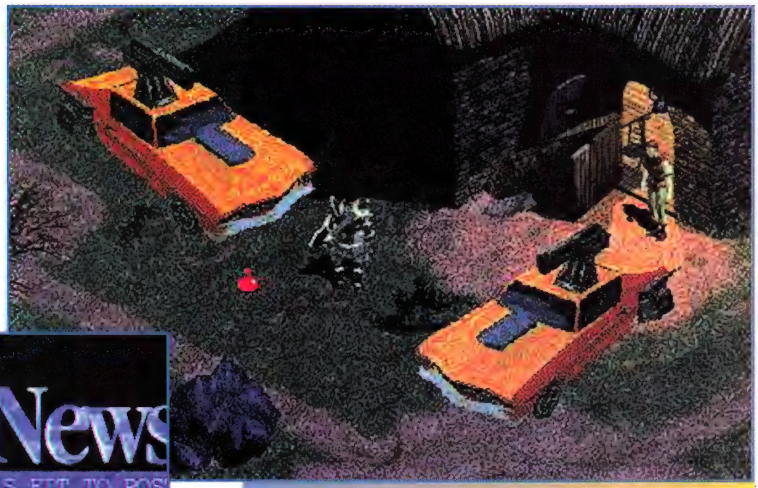
"When we first put up the 3d0 Sucks page, we were told to remove our slander or be terminated," she writes. (She's careful to put the "d" in lowercase and replace the "O" with a zero.) That she's left it up says something about the beauty of the Web: Every voice is as loud as every other, and when the company's not leaning over your shoulder, there's freedom for everyone to say what they've gotta say.

With an eye to giving some of these sites their just due, we've rounded up a collection of some of the very best enthusiast sites on the Web. They're not necessarily the biggest and best-known; in fact, we specifically paid attention to spots that have somehow escaped the wide eye of the online-gaming public. Each of these sites is a wonderful example of a gamer's burning passion for computer gaming—something truly worth celebrating, and something we'll hopefully see a lot more of as the Internet and gaming worlds continue to merge.

This list is by no means comprehensive; rather, it's just a glimpse of a still-burgeoning movement. But these sites point the way toward the seamless union of game and gamer that is the future of the industry. Now, you point the browser…

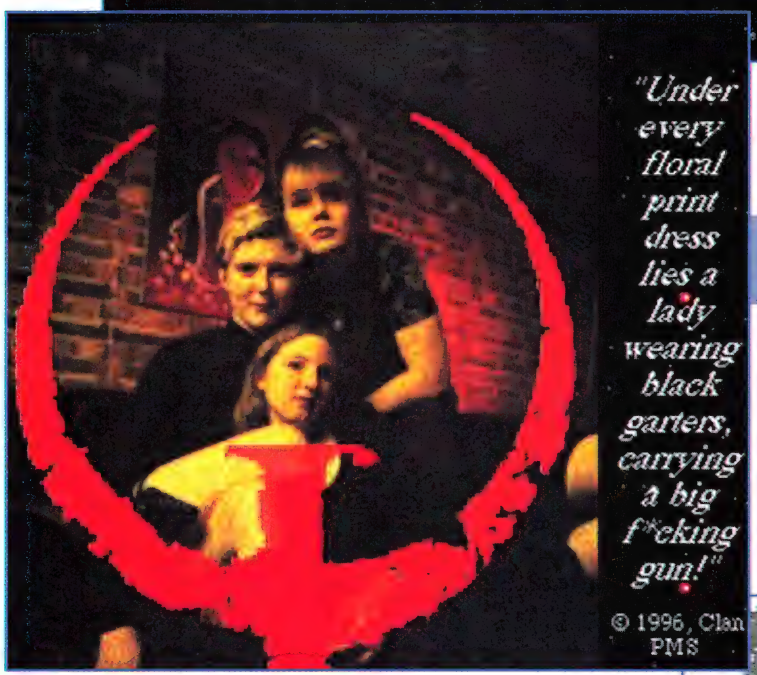
Blue's News
www.bluesnews.com

The daily bible for Quake aficionados. The real strength of this site is the vast pool of contacts that email Blue with news, utilities, skins, and other assorted Quaketoids. The countdown to Quake 2 is already in full swing, and you can bet that Blue's will be the forward observer for its arrival. An indispensable site.



The Diablo Art Page
www.geocities.com/Area51/Corridor/6043/diabloart.html

Soon to be (if not already) the PC Game Art Page, Bryan Fordney's site presents his inventive and hilarious art creations. His modus operandi is to take a Diablo screenshot and put it through frightening changes. You can see his I-76 hybridization, Diablo newbies being unloaded by bus, and the attack of a fearsome, giant, pixelized Super Mario. There are many such sublime snapshots in the site's Archives section.



Clan PMS
www.planetquake.com/pms

We know where the boys are...so where are the ladies? Clan PMS is among the Net's most feared targeters of the Y chromosome, and their homepage is without a doubt the ballsiest on the Web (sorry, men). A photo of three of these dazzling deathmatchers is followed by the unforgettable tagline "Under every floral print dress lies a lady wearing black garters, carrying a big f*cking gun!" The site provides a grrrl's perspective on Quake.

The Scion Sanctuary
Tomb Raider movie. So who'll get to play Lara?
Sunday 1st June
Next Generation (the online gaming magazine people) have a small chunk of news 'confirming' that a Tomb Raider movie is to go ahead. They have this to say:
There's a Tomb Raider Movie in the works. But who should play Lara Croft? Time for you to decide...
Although there's little news about the Tomb Raider movie, Eidos representatives have made it clear that talks are underway. But the big question is - who gets to play Lara?
Ideas floating around the NG offices (not all of them serious) include Lucy Lawless, Elizabeth Hurley, Uma Thurman, Sandra Bullock, Michelle Kaha, Julia Louise Dreyfuss and Drew Barrymore.
They then go on to offer you the chance to vote for which it should be, in a kind of in-the-office sweepstake thing that you get all the time apparently. And, just in case you've as lost as I was, Lucy Lawless is "the very beautiful actress and stuntwoman who plays the part of Xena: Warrior Princess" (according to Perfect 10) and, hey! She's a cutie.

The Scion Sanctuary
www.amorph.demon.co.uk/scion

The Blue's News of Tomb Raider, not to put too fine a point on it. Especially useful here is the wealth of info on Tomb Raider 2, with speculation on plot and settings, culled from a variety of online sources (including an alleged Core Design leaker). Also of interest are news tidbits, such as the possibility of a Tomb Raider licensing deal for a Saturday-morning cartoon show and prospects of a movie deal. We vote for Liz Hurley to play Lara.

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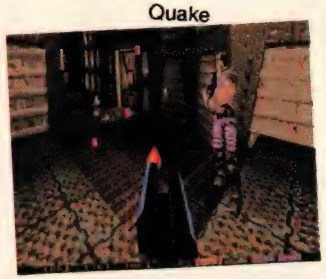
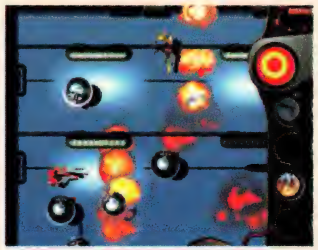


Scud: Industrial Evolution



HEAT.NET is compatible with nearly every multi-player PC game including Blood,™ Quake,™ and the new Scud: Industrial Evolution.™ Plus, the first in a long line of games, HEAT Warz,™ Alien Race™ and Net Fighter™ have been designed exclusively for HEAT (with maximum Reptilian Complex dispersion in mind) and are available for free on the network.

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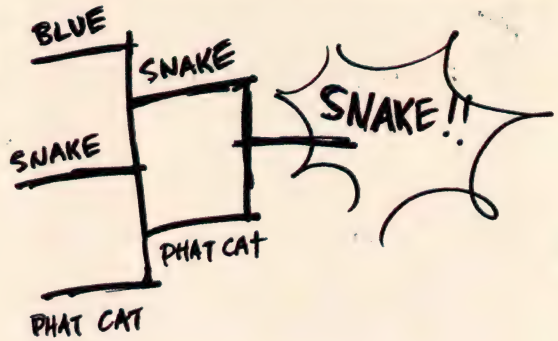
HEAT is the only network with frequent player points (Degrees) that can be used for purchase discounts and redeemed for prizes. These incentives increase the frequency of play and, hence, decrease the likelihood of real-life aggression rearing its ugly head.

5 CREATE TOURNAMENTS AND LADDERS FOR MORE COMPETITION. (AS ONE MAN RISES, ALL MANKIND RISES!):



HEAT offers huge, automated and secure tournaments and the ability to rise to the top against the best competition the world has to offer—creating the ultimate competitive arena on the internet. But more importantly, a place that nurtures the safe, death-free release of primal urges.

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Mr. Wolf's Tomb Raider Stuff

www.vvm.com/~hfowler/tombraider/home.html

Along with Scion Sanctuary, Heath Fowler's TR site is the other bookmark for Lara lovers. The Lara's Moves section provides detailed instruction on performing some of Lara's more expert maneuvers, which is extremely helpful if you're one of those people who just can't seem to get the hang of the handstand/walkover. There's also a complete walkthrough and a TR2 watch, plus a complete list of cheats.

Steel Panthers II Tankies Leaguer Scenarios

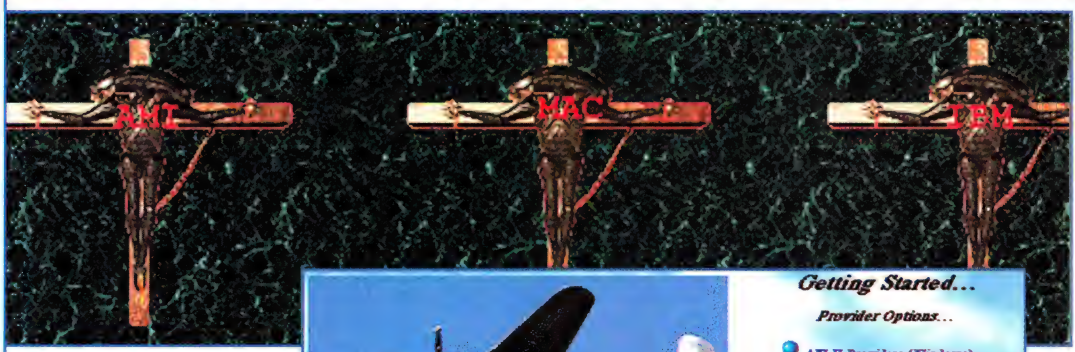
www.pcug.org.au/~mnoble/SP2.HTM

A former tank commander for the Royal Australian Armoured Corps has designed a number of scenarios for Steel Panther II, all based on actual Australian military exercises. These "tactical-engagements-without-troops" (TEWTs) speculate on the fierce engagements between an Aussie tank-battle group and an invasion force from the fictitious island of Musoria. The battles are brilliantly conceived and executed in the SPII engine, building on the previous scenarios to form a genuinely nerve-wracking and addictive campaign. Play through the Leopard Series and you'll feel like you just tore through a brutal Tom Clancy novel.

The Patches Scrolls

www.cdrom.com/~mr2/index.html

"Death to all bugs!" is the rallying cry of this patch depository, and the point is driven home by the graphics of crucified H.R. Giger aliens. This site contains a definitive archive of PC game patches, and it's scrupulously updated. In one day, June 4, there were patches added for Voodoo/Voodoo Rush for MDK, a Voodoo driver for GLQuake, a performance patch for the Formula 1 beta, and patches for U.S. Navy Fighters 1.3, Outlaws 1.1, and X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter 1.1.



Getting Started...
Provider Options...
AV II Providers (Windows)
AV Classic (AV for windows) Providers
Download the Game
Tips, Tricks, and Training
NEW!
Bullethead's (Head Trainer) Delphi Internet) AV Training Page
Brooke's AWTA (AV Training Academy) Manual
The Planes of AV
Getting Started in Full Realism
Currently in Air Warrior...
Upcoming Special Event...

Welcome to Neale's Age of Rifles Webpage!
AGE OF RIFLES
I've had 1350 Visitors since 4/23/97
This page consists of homemade scenarios

Air Warrior Community

http://users.ariesgames.com/~shebop/index2.html

Cindy "Shebop" Iritsky, the Air Warrior special-events coordinator for AOL, CompuServe, and other ISPs, maintains a comprehensive hangar for Air Warriors the world over. Her one-stop base of operations provides comprehensive links throughout the Air Warrior community, with branches to many game servers, resources for beginners, news on special events, and a wonderful array of squadron/pilot homepages.

Neale's Age of Rifles Webpage

www.geocities.com/EnchantedForest/Dell/2532

This fascinating collection of scenarios is a must-see for fans of SSI's Age of Rifles. Neale Bergman has taken the game's extensive scenario editor and explored it to its fullest. The historical and strategic variety of Neale's scenarios is truly amazing: Thermopylae, Hastings, Bunker Hill, the Alamo (I made an Alamo scenario back when the game first came out, but Neale's kicks its ass), Napoléon's fight for Cairo, and more.

RPG GUILDS

It's no surprise that some of the best enthusiast sites on the Web are homes to the various online RPG guilds. With the time and energy these people put into their sites, they could be out solving the world's problems (just kidding, folks). As it is, they provide themselves with clever and innovative bastions on the Net, haven to banner and liege...and whatever other madness they are able to muster.

Meridian 59

3DO's M59 is the prototypical first-person, graphical online RPG; as such, it has accrued dozens of guild sites. The most interesting of this always-interesting subgenre include a comprehensive info site, a guild site, and a site devoted, curiously enough, to hatred of 3DO.

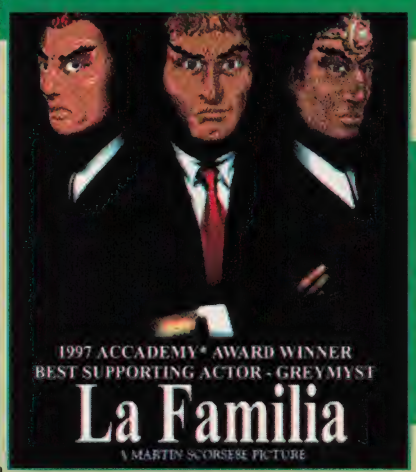
Meridian 59 Bible
www.wolsi.com/~orbs/meridian

The M59 Bible is a one-stop depot of news and links. The latter are especially useful, as they provide you with gateways to almost every important guild.

Dragon Order
www.dragonorder.com

Siren's Dragon Order guild represents the pinnacle of disgruntled fan sites. The guild members are waiting for Ultima Online. In the meantime, their plucky "3d0 Sucks" section chronicles their side of the story regarding the Order's falling out with M59. Here's wishing you better luck in the next world, Siren...

La Familia
www.geocities.com/Area51/Corridor/3492/index.html

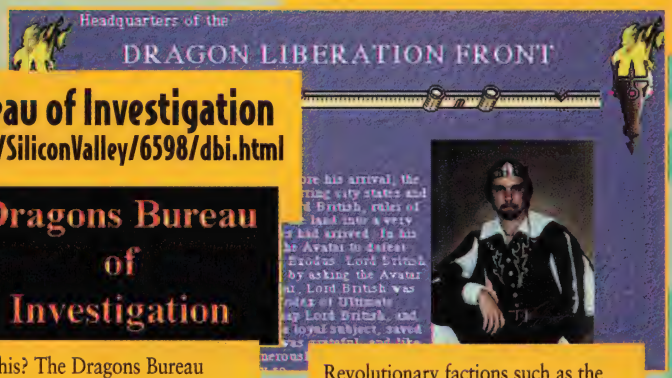


This may be the single most enjoyable enthusiast site on the Web. La Familia is a little slice o' Scorsese, M59-style. The guild is organized like a New York mafia family. Be sure to check out the family album, with its classic character descriptions. RPGers will appreciate the Top Ten Ways to Turn Down MUD-Sex, witticisms you can use in Meridian's bars.

Ultima Online

Sure, UO wasn't live yet, but that hadn't stopped hundreds of guilds from assembling before summer. **www.moongates.com** is a great source of UO links, including a Britannia newspaper that's among the cooler guild sites revving up for Ultima Online.

Dragon Liberation Front
www.compusmart.ab.ca/warf/dlf.htm



Revolutionary factions such as the Dragon Liberation Front seek to rid Britannia of its "oppressor." Sure, sure, they want to establish democracy and accomplish all of the post–Magna Carta reforms that Britannia lacks at the moment. Now we can enjoy a good, old-fashioned struggle for the throne.

Protectors of Virtue and Lord British (PVLB)
www.bestware.net/whisper/pvlb.shtml

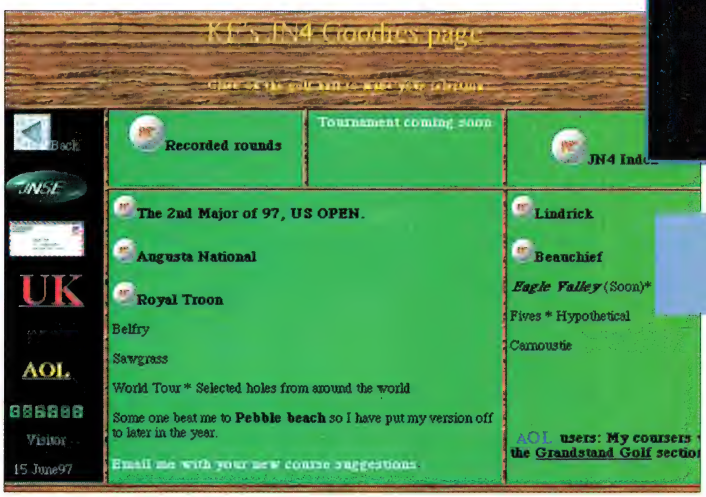
They revere their liege, Lord British, and fight to protect his crown from usurpers. The Protectors of Virtue and Lord British (PVLB) have become sworn enemies with such guilds as the Dethroners of Lord British and the anti-sovereignty terrorist group the Dragon Liberation Front. Politics with a knife twist.

Dragons Bureau of Investigation
www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/6598/dbi.html

Okay, how to describe this? The Dragons Bureau of Investigation exists as a federal body charged with investigating "The X-Quests," the unusual and unexplained cases that warrant the attention of the bureau's Mulders and Scullys. Organized in layers of bureaucratic red tape, complete with assistant directors, this guild looks like a scream.

Andrew's X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter Page
http://home.earthlink.net/~kerdchana/

It's no surprise that several X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter squadrons and leagues have claimed sectors of the Web. Andrew's is one of the first.



KF's Software Goodies
http://web.ukonline.co.uk/kf.baker/

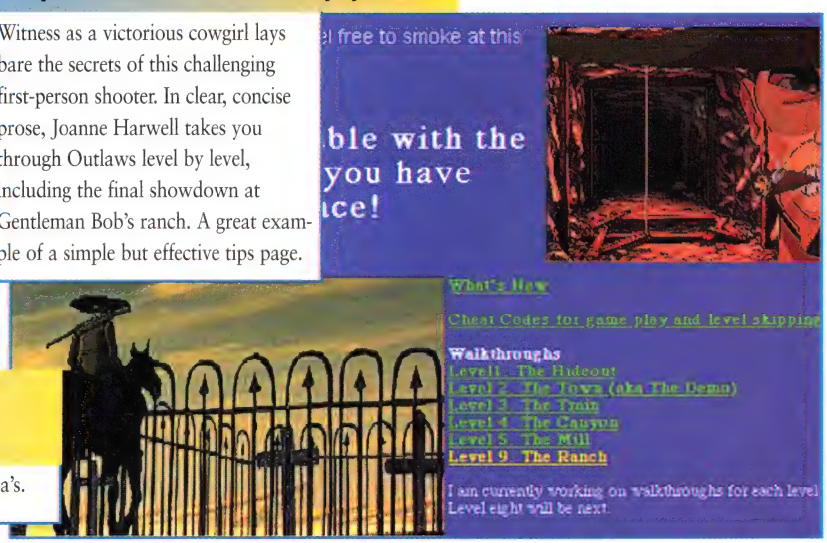
Kenneth Baker's site contains a choice selection of famous courses modeled meticulously with the Jack Nicklaus 4 Course Designer for play with Accolade's golf title. Augusta and Troon are standouts, perfectly re-created. Baker's amateur work was good enough to convince Accolade that he should be aboard to design courses under their banner, meaning that the courses on his site may be the last ones from him you won't have to pay for. So download his goodies and turn your hotlinks into golf links.

Erick's Duke Nukem 3D MAP Page
http://192.216.191.21/TimesSquare/4185/n2-maps.html

A site that has given Dukers thousands of hours of mutant mayhem. Erick's MAP collection is not only big—currently 135 and growing—but it's high-quality. Erick goes through them thoroughly, delivering a sharp, dead-on synopsis of each, along with a 1–10 rating. There are numerous maps here that eclipse some of the 3D Realms–generated levels in Duke Nukem 3D. Of particular brilliance are Aliens20.zip, a detailed re-creation of the Ripley rescue scene in Aliens, and Crypt.zip, an unforgettable design. This site could keep Duke alive and rocking forever.

Outlaws Harwell Homepage
http://cust2.iamerica.net/homepage.html

Witness as a victorious cowgirl lays bare the secrets of this challenging first-person shooter. In clear, concise prose, Joanne Harwell takes you through Outlaws level by level, including the final showdown at Gentleman Bob's ranch. A great example of a simple but effective tips page.

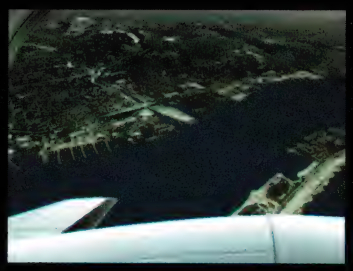

What's New
Cheat Codes for game play and level skipping
Walkthroughs
Level1 The Hideout
Level2 The Town (aka The Demo)
Level3 The Train
Level4 The Canyon
Level5 The Mill
Level9 The Ranch
I am currently working on walkthroughs for each level
Level eight will be next.

Need for Speed II Page
www.mcs.net/~grant/screen.htm

See replays of rough NFS II match-ups at sites like Grant Gryska's.

WE DIDN'T SET OUT TO
CHANGE THE WORLD.
JUST A SMALL PART OF IT
CALLED THE SKY.

It takes more than a team of computer engineers to create the ultimate flight simulator. It takes a sense of childlike wonder, forever gazing skyward, to go beyond mere flight re-creation and capture the magic of flight itself. Never before has a single flight simulator captured this experience so



INTRODUCING SI

completely. Here, you'll find the broad strokes and the fine touches. You'll choose from a hangar of five civilian aircraft, ranging from the introductory Cessna 172 Skyhawk to the dual-throttled thrill of a Citation Jet. At the other end of the runway are 29 photo-

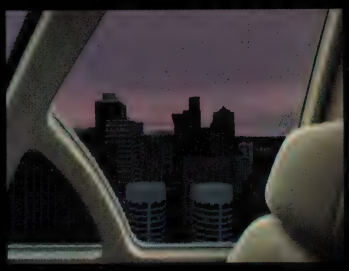
KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST

- CROSS-COUNTRY NAVAID COVERAGE
- GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM
- AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL
- EVALUATION FLIGHT ASSIGNMENTS
- PHOTOREALISTIC PANELS
- FLIGHT TUTORIAL
- OVER 3,000 AIRPORTS/100'S OF CITIES
- DUAL THROTTLES FOR MULTI-ENGINE AIRCRAFT
- LIVE ON-LINE MAP DISPLAY
- 27 MILLION ELEVATION POINTS

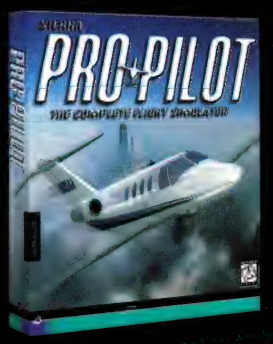
Dynamix

realistic cities and over 3,000 airports, each rendered in exacting detail. All major rivers, forests and canyons are



afforded such faithful geographic representation they could double as a map. Within 25 nautical miles of any city, the flying world is rendered with lifelike realism. You'll hear from Air Traffic

Control and other pilots, and learn to navigate the sky with the close company of other planes. Then, upon touchdown, debrief and compare your performance to over 30 full-motion training videos. This is Sierra Pro Pilot: The Complete Flight Simulator. Both a statement of what a flight sim should be today, and the promise of what one can be tomorrow.



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PC GAMES A-LIST™

BEST OF

For games we've rated as an A or A- over the past year, admittance to the A-List is the ultimate honor; if it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections. Only the best are good enough for the A-List.

- **Afterlife** (LucasArts)
- **Civilization II** (MicroProse)
- **Close Combat** (Microsoft)
- **Comanche 3** (NovaLogic)
- **Command & Conquer: Red Alert** (Westwood Studios)
- **Crusader: No Regret** (Origin Systems)
- **Daggerfall** (Bethesda Softworks)
- **Diablo** (Blizzard Entertainment)
- **Duke Nukem 3D** (GT Interactive)
- **Links LS** (Access Software)
- **Lords of the Realm II** (Sierra On-Line)
- **Master of Orion II** (MicroProse)
- **MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries** (Activision)
- **MDK** (Playmates Interactive)
- **The Neverhood** (DreamWorks)
- **The Pandora Directive** (Access Software)
- **Quake** (GT Interactive)
- **Settlers II: Gold Ed.** (Blue Byte)
- **Syndicate Wars** (Electronic Arts)
- **X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter** (LucasArts)

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Yes, the *PC Games* editors play tons of games, but there are some we've stuck with beyond the call of duty. Here are the five games we've been playing the most over the past month.

1. Shadow Warrior shareware
2. C&C: Red Alert
3. MDK
4. Dungeon Keeper
5. Need for Speed II

HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. It's generally the best overall game of the month, although occasionally a game will warrant this honor despite its not being rated as highly as some other games because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game?

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This takes into account ease of multiplayer setup. An independent rating.

Send a chain letter on your lunch hour

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gemstone.net/go/pga10

You are not alone

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Play it right now

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Limitless as your imagination

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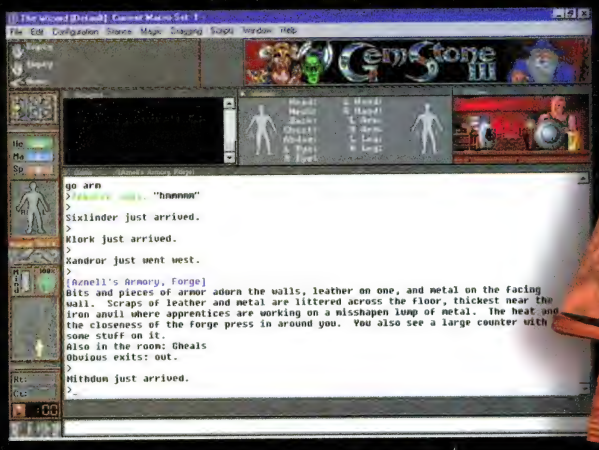
Only $9.95 for a month of play.
Try it now and play FREE for your first two weeks.


GemStone III
go arm
"hmmmm"
Sixlinder just arrived.
Klork just arrived.
Xandror just went west.
[Aynell's Armory, Forge]
Bits and pieces of armor adorn the walls, leather on one, and metal on the facing wall. Scraps of leather and metal are littered across the floor, thickest near the iron anvil where apprentices are working on a misshapen lump of metal. The heat and the closeness of the forge press in around you. You also see a large counter with some stuff on it.
Also in the room: Gheals
Obvious exits: out.
Withdum just arrived.

Created by
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Scud

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Multiple Missions pit Scud against a bizarre collection of villains and enemy Scuds.

Obliterate up to 16 opponents over LAN or HEAT.NET.

Top down view and easy to master controls keep action fast and furious.

www.scud.com

Scud is the coolest robot assassin to ever be dispensed from a vending machine. He's programmed to self destruct, but intent on sticking around quite a bit longer. He's a coin operated killer hellbent on customer satisfaction, but there's always one sick, twisted freak who won't listen to reason.

Gee, what should I spend my minimum wage paycheck on?
The Fatsucking Abdomax 9000_or Scud: Industrial Evolution
FATSUCKING ABDOMAX 9000
TAP! TAP!
That's easy, get Scud: Industrial Evolution! You get to wreak bloody havoc with a ton of powerups and weapons.
Go on multiple missions! Be one of three different characters! Destroy up to 16 of your freak friends in multiplayer competition!
It's the kind of senseless violence that makes you feel warm and fuzzy inside.
Compared to this game, your Fatsucking Abdomax is weaker than Kenny G.
PC games are wack. I'd rather tune my tummy.
SNAK! SNAK!
Another hopeless case.
Sweet mother of Ghandi!
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
MY HAIR!

"Illustration by Edvis"

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- Multiple Weapons!
- Single player, multiplayer, or compete on HEAT.NET!

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Populous: The Third Coming

By Rob Smith

A thriving settlement, complete with Drum Tower, Temple, Dojo, and Boathouse. Note the Super Warriors, who can really do some serious converting of enemies with their glowing fists.

The ultimate God game is reincarnated

Can you believe that it's been nearly 10 years since Populous first gave gamers the concept of the "God" game? Really, it has. But the gap between the release of Populous 2 (1992) and the forthcoming Populous: The Third Coming has not diminished the stature of the Populous name in the game community, which has long awaited this release.

Players can use the full-globe viewing option to move and track their forces on a larger scale.

This third incarnation has been deliberately titled "The Third Coming," as opposed to just Populous 3. "While the essence is the same, it's a completely different game," project leader Alan Wright tells us. "There are thousands of gamers out there who never played either of the first two games, and since this is a very different way of presenting the game, we didn't want to alienate those people."

One of the most obvious differences is in the graphic representation of the world. "We wanted to give players a feel for the scale of the world they're converting," says Wright. "The curved look was pretty simple to do, as it turned out. We were able to do it with the original engine that was created for the game."

Achieving the high level of detail in the world's texturing was done by creating one large bitmap that was then laid on top of the wireframe landscape and pulled, pushed, and sculpted to produce the 3D environment. This is also important in the gameplay differences from the first two games. Where both Populous 1 and 2 used a random landscape generator to create an unlimited supply of worlds, this third installment features 30 (or more) choreographed levels. "The terrain shape and feature set are important to the gameplay, and the level of detail is not something that could be re-created easily with a random generator; hence, we've gone for carefully created worlds," Wright says.

Apart from green shrubbery, there will also be worlds with ice, water, and lava elements to add to the problems of spreading your word.

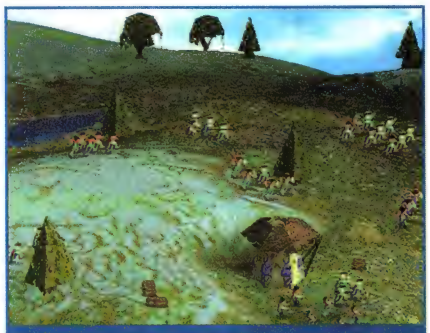
In these worlds, you begin with one female shaman, who is the focal point for channeling your godly powers to the hordes of wild people destined to become your followers. Attracting these wild people is the key. Once they become your worshippers, they can be instructed to build a variety of structures to further cement and enhance your godly influence. Of course, as with most strategy games, resources are needed to fund development. Fortunately, wood is

THE SPELLS

Burn: burns vegetation • **Blast:** hits worshippers • **Hypnotism:** controls your enemies • **Lightning Bolt** • **Insect Plague:** drives people out of buildings • **Ghost Army:** an illusion that acts as a decoy • **Erode:** changes the level structure of the terrain; possibly used to create a natural defense in the mountains for your base • **Swamp:** sinks buildings • **Angel of Death:** similar to the Knight from the original Populous; you summon him to fight your enemies • **Flatten:** more powerful version of Erode • **Whirlwind** • **Firestorm** • **Earthquake** • **Land Bridge** • **Volcano** • **Invisibility:** use on spies to find out how many characters an opponent has hiding in buildings

Awkward terrain shapes will make placement of buildings tricky, and altering them will require the use of earth-shattering magic.

"Kumbaya..."



Onward, fighting soldiers—marching off to war, keeping the formation that you built before.

the only resource your people need to cultivate. Trees scattered around the landscape are thinned out by persistent deforestation, but in a neat touch, they do regrow over time, as long as they aren't fully destroyed.

As your settlement grows, so does the interest of other godlike beings intent on persuading your followers to their side. Be it through straight-up warfare or more sneaky measures such as spying, creating ghost armies, or hypnotizing enemies, there is a war to be waged to secure control of a world. You select your followers and move them Red Alert–style, using a minimum of commands. "We wanted a simple feature set so as not to intimidate anyone, but combinations of spells and people lead to very rich gameplay," Wright explains. Using a combination of left and right mouse-clicks, all the options are easily accessible. In addition, onscreen icons represent what your unit types are up to (standing still, moving, fighting), so you can be in touch with all your units wherever you are in the world. (Gods are omnipotent, after all!)

As you build certain structures, more potent spells become available to your shaman. These can get mighty powerful, as lightning bolts and the simple burning of vegetation (removing resources from your opponents) make way for terrain-shattering earthquakes and the ultimate Volcano spell. Here, the power of the gods comes to the fore in hugely impressive style as mountain ranges are flattened or mounds erupt out of the landscape, spewing lava over a devastatingly large area. Benevolence isn't always a godly virtue when pretenders are vying for the faith of your minions.

Each structure is built in stages before becoming usable.

Any spells cast on the world have to go through the shaman, and she only emits a limited sphere of influence. Thus, to throw a Firestorm spell into the massed ranks of an opposing god, the shaman has to be fairly close—which, of course, puts her own life in jeopardy. This requires that fine balance between bravado and victory, since defeating the shaman is the way to win each world.

Nonlinear gameplay means that after defeating a certain number of worlds, your order of progression is entirely up to you. Should one world prove too difficult, attempting another might open up a new spell, enabling you to complete those worlds you failed in earlier. Of course, there will also be multiplayer options for up to four gods battling over a LAN, and possibly Internet gaming for a limited pool of wild people.

Populous: The Third Coming offers an intriguing departure from the path followed by the previous two games, while essentially retaining their concept. Quality graphics (640-by-480 will be possible on a P120, although the game will also run in 320-by-200 on a P60) mixed with the subtle balance of worshipper power, wars, and spell-acquisition should make for an engaging strategy game. And for anyone concerned about the concept of encroaching on religious territory, Alan Wright has this to say: "If we upset people, sorry—we didn't mean to. It's a game." Amen to that.

THE BUILDINGS

Teepee • Hut • Farm • Drum Tower • Wall • Gate • Temple: creates preacher • **Spy hut:** creates spy • **Dojo:** creates warrior • **Super Warrior Dojo:** creates Super Warrior • **Boathouse:** build to cross water • **Balloon House:** build to cross terrain quickly

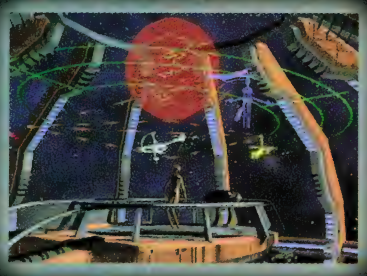
The third viewing angle gives a flatter perspective of your growing community.

POPULOUS: THE THIRD COMING

DEVELOPER:	Bullfrog Productions
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts
WEB:	www.bullfrog.co.uk
AVAILABLE:	September 1997

IT'S ABOUT

"TURN OFF THE LIGHTS, CRANK THE SUBWOOFER, AND GO FOR IT."

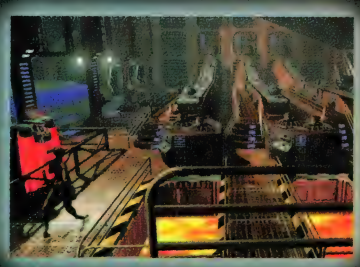


- PC GAMER

"The game is much more than satisfactory, it is one of the best of the year."

- COMPUTER GAMES ENTERTAINMENT

"The best aspect of 'The Arrival' is its beautifully rendered 3-D graphics, containing well-drawn, high-resolution environments, with thousands of detailed sprites."



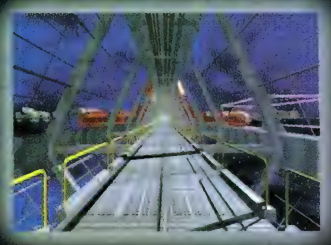
- GAMESPOT

THE GAME.
IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MOVIE.

"MYST MEETS THE ALIENS."

- WINDOWS SOURCES

"'The Arrival' has top-notch sound effects and atmospheric noises."



- COMPUTER & NET PLAYER

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What to show the world

Redline: The Continuing Story

By Rob Smith

3D acceleration gives the explosions a solid, rounded, powerful feel.

The long road from game concept to final mastering—with all the stages between—is strewn with obstacles. For Beyond Games, furious work to achieve creative milestones is exacerbated by the requirements of the trade—publisher Accolade wants to show off the game, retailers and the press want to see what it's all about. So, in time for this year's E3, a version of sufficient quality had to be up and running to offer a suitable representation of what Redline's going to be like when it's done. We bugged Beyond's producer, Clark Stacey, to get an update on the continuing story...

So, what did you have to go through to get the Redline build ready and settled to present to the world?

Something that often gets left out of milestone scheduling is the needs of the publisher's marketing and PR people. Redline is a real labor of love, and that makes it especially hard to show anybody anything that isn't quite there yet.

But it was playable and looked fantastic on display. How did that come about?

There was a massive crunch here to bring something mind-blowing to E3. At 6:10 in the morning the day before the show, I burned the version of the CD we showed, just before barely catching a plane to Atlanta at 7:00—that's how down to the wire it was. Since the gameplay is split between arena combat and missions the player performs for his chosen gang, we wanted to show an example of each.

How many placeholder features had to be incorporated, and did adding these for the purposes of the show cost time in the greater scheme of finishing the game?

We threw in some vocals, sounds, animation, and such that were placeholder, but aside from the vocals, I don't think anybody thought they *looked* placeholder. Even without some of the final polish, the game looked incredible. The night before, I wound up doing a cheesy Snake Plissken/Lee Van Cleef voice for the demo, which has since become a running joke around here. *[It was pretty damn amusing, and, in our opinion, should be included in there somewhere along the line!—Ed.]*

The E3 demo won't slow the development process, however. Our design people usually work with placeholder art so that Kris [Johnson, lead programmer] and the programming team have some means to see how the code behaves while the final art is being developed.

If the engine is virtually finished, does that mean that level design is now the key element to work on? How's that going?

The design of this engine is Kris' magnum opus, and it's being built with future expandability and portability in mind. Therefore, it'll never be considered completely finished, but we've reached the point where we can play the levels that are being designed with the core set of features we want in place. So, in that sense, it's now up to Jim and Dale [Meier, the artists] and the other art staff to take the look and feel they've created to the limit—people play games, not engines.

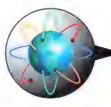
You can drive along those rickety bridges in the latest version of the game.

You mentioned extra staff last time we talked; have they been hired?

Yep. Matt Thorn, an extremely talented game programmer, has recently joined us from Westwood Studios. We've also added a few artists with the blend of 3D talent and fevered imagination we're looking for.

So what was the general impression and feedback from the show?

[The game] was only shown publicly with 3Dfx and Power VR, but we obviously took a lot of people by surprise who weren't expecting such a hot engine to materialize at the show without warning. I love watching people when they first enter our Coliseum level—they think they're seeing a full-screen FMV until they start moving around, and then they think that the stuff in the background must be a bitmap or inaccessible to the player. When they realize that everything is accessible, 3D, and real, their mouths fall open. How many other game designers get to see that?



SEE MORE ONLINE
http://www.pcgames.com

REDLINE

DEVELOPER:	Beyond Games
PUBLISHER:	Accolade 800-245-7744 www.accolade.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	November 1997

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TSR

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1998

"...impressive strategic richness... beautiful graphics and solid gameplay."
-Computer Gaming World

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GAME...

...Meets Three Legendary Eras

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- Advanced A.I. with team specific styles and coaching strategies
- Intense multi-player action using the Gravis Grip Multi-player adapter
- "Time Travel" with teams to create fantasy matchups
- Action and Coach Mode play

1932

- 20-man rosters require most of your players to play both offense and defense. Get ready to use Dan Marino as a defensive back or Junior Seau at running back!
- The football is larger and harder to throw. Do you take a chance on the pass or grind it out with a running attack?

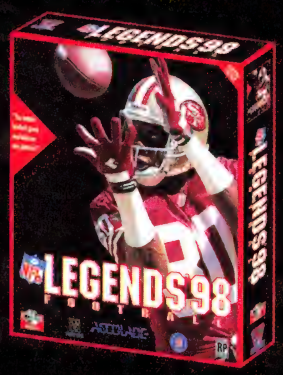
1950

- Rules favor the running game.
- Goal posts were placed in the front of the end zone. The "Post" pattern was commonly used to run defenders into the posts for an easy touch-down reception.

1968

- Play a little rougher on the receivers. You can hit them anywhere on the field until the ball is thrown...and it's all legal!
- Players like Dick Butkus ruled the gridiron, paving the way for the modern-day player.

In Stores September 1st!



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PC CD-ROM WINDOWS 95

PLAYERS INC

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Dungeon Keeper

Be really, really evil

By Rob Smith

One day, all this could be yours.

PC GAMES A LIST

Those with good long-term memories may remember announcements about the imminent release of Dungeon Keeper well over a year ago. The game's concepts turned traditional ideas on their head, and stuck in the mind. Now, finally, it's finished—and it's been worth the wait.

To recap on that innovative concept, you assume the role of a Dungeon Keeper, evil dude extraordinaire. You eat namby-pamby heroes for breakfast. Sadly, these pathetic creatures exhibit a bunch of moralistic ideals, including the appallingly flawed concept that evil is wrong. As everyone knows, being bad is good. So you find yourself happily creating a pit of evil worthy of Beelzebub himself and rousing the good intentions of heroes everywhere. Your job is to repel these intrusions, and ensure that any competing Dungeon Keepers are summarily destroyed.

Use the hand cursor to pick up and move creatures. This imp needs to be placed on the red tiles to begin converting the enemy Dungeon Keeper's white tiles to your side.

To this end, you begin most of the opening levels with a band of happy imps who do the running, fetching, carrying, digging, and mining. Meanwhile, you flex architectural muscles constructing lairs, treasure rooms, hatcheries, training rooms, and libraries that will ultimately attract more bad guys. As these new areas are dug, they're claimed under your banner. With the basic rooms in place, creatures begin flocking to your cause.

Cash is an important factor, and the land that you're aiming to transform from peaceful greenness to savaged blackness is rich in gold seams. Here the imps go to work, picking at the gold and storing it in the treasure rooms. A vast wad of cash in the vault will attract creatures such as warlocks.

In this sense, Dungeon Keeper follows a traditional format of resource management. Building rooms and paying creatures cost money, and so does casting spells—there never seems to be enough.

But it's not as simple as that. Expanding your dungeon beyond the standard rooms involves research. When given a library, warlocks and dragons research the technology to build advanced rooms—barracks and guard posts, a prison and torture chamber, a graveyard and temple—and additional spells, including Speed Monster, Conceal Monster, Lightning Bolt, Heal, and Cave-In, working up to the fearful Armageddon spell.

There's tremendous variation in employable tactics. Construct a prison, and suddenly you can order your creatures to merely beat up, not actually kill, enemies. The imps then drag them behind bars where they may die (and become skeletons, fighting for your side) or be thrown in the torture chamber. Here, a careful blend of kindness (feeding them) and punishment (watching the torturers do their thing) causes some creatures to turn to your side.

Ordering all these minions about could've been confusing, but both the interface and icon control are intuitive and comprehensive. Access all the commands from a tabbed menu bar to the side of the screen; then cast spells and place rooms wherever you want with a simple click. Keyboard shortcuts also help, as does the ability to right-click on a creature in the monster list to zoom to it on the map. The play balance may appear daunting at first, but it has been finely tuned to get you familiar with these faster methods as the pace picks up.

All this strategy and action is viewed from a 3D perspective that can be fully rotated. And, if you cast Possess Creature on one of your minions, it propels you into his body. Suddenly you can view the dungeon in first-person (objects are very blocky close up, but you never lose your bearings). Each creature even has its own view—flies have a multi-lens effect, for example. In this mode, all the creature's powers are at your disposal. These powers increase with level advancement, and each creature can be trained up to the 10th level, generating enhanced abilities.

Teach this powerful samurai a lesson by throwing him to the torture masters.

Of the 30 levels, the opening 5 are well-designed tutorials introducing you to the concept of room-

The Dungeon Heart is what you guard from attack, and destroying enemy Dungeon Keepers' Hearts is one way of winning a level.

building and requirements for attracting creatures. A further 20 levels lead you to a final encounter with Ultima's hero, the Avatar (turning him to the side of evil should be a treat). These missions are interspersed with five hidden bonus levels.

What really stands out as you complete missions is the incredible attention to detail and the superb quality of the creatures' AI. Each type—from the lowest fly to the sulking, arrogant Horned Demons—has a distinct personality. Directing them to their tasks becomes incredibly intuitive as the AI recognizes your wishes from moving them around the dungeon, and rarely are you left wondering what a creature is doing and why. Just to ensure that you know what you've instructed a particular creature to do, they each have "thought bubbles"—small icons representing where they're going, as well as their state of mind. A sad face, for example, indicates that if gold reserves are running low, they may desert very soon.

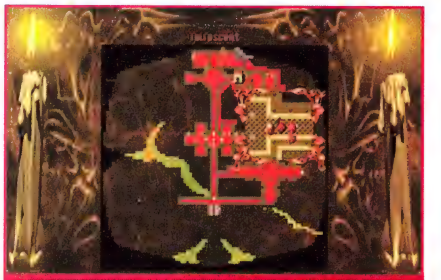
A Level 2 fly's-eye view of the training room.

Looking through the prison doors from the perspective of a ninth-level priestess. Each character has its own name.

Graphically, the game isn't revolutionary. In low-res it looks pretty awful, especially when there are a number of creatures onscreen at once. That said, a 2D option does allow the game to run on a 486DX2 in DOS. Hi-res requires a P133 minimum but makes all the difference. Great lighting effects cast shadows on all creatures, adding a dullness that enhances the underground feeling of the dungeon.

The musical score is fun and backed by great individual sound effects for the creatures as they are moved, grabbed, and slapped (it's amazing what a swift backhand will do to up the work rate!). A voice-over alerts you to events such as creatures leaving, getting annoyed, and fighting among themselves, and when new spells and rooms have been researched.

Sadly, the multiplayer options disappoint, considering the delights promised as the game was developed. What you get is a fairly standard resource-management battle, enhanced by certain elements shining throughout—torturing a friend's star warlock, converting him to your side, then sending him to attack his former patron is the kind of thing that will generate plenty of entertaining moments. You can't play as heroes in multi-



Enemy heroes are on their way! The main map view shows them as white dots. Use the cursor to magnify an area to see the type and level of creature in that location.

A fly fights a dragon for territory as other battles rage. Right-click on any creature's head to zoom to that character.

player games, and they're limited to LAN play for four players (with an Internet patch hopefully coming soon after the game's release).

What Dungeon Keeper does, it does quite brilliantly. It's got a personality and sense of humor all its own, as well as tremendous style—making the battle through the levels a totally addictive joy. It's a model for AI integration and innovative gameplay design, but it misses receiving the "groundbreaking" accolade by coming up short in the multiplayer arena. What's finally been delivered is a game that will give any action- or strategy-game fan hours of intriguing gameplay. Don't hesitate to add it to your collection.

DUNGEON KEEPER

GAMEPLAY: A
GETTING STARTED: B+
GRAPHICS: B+
SOUND CHECK: B+

A- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B

A jewel in the Bullfrog crown.

DEVELOPER:	Bullfrog Productions
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.bullfrog.co.uk
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.22/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	DOS: 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, VGA; Win 95: P120, 8MB RAM, 65MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Remember, imps can be trained, too. A third-level imp is far more effective, so take any chance you can to throw imps in the training room. ▼ When a level's starting money is low, don't construct bigger rooms than you initially need. By all means, have the imps tunnel bigger areas, but you don't need to fill every available square. When digging out rooms, allow space for future growth. ▼ Watch on the map mode for the white dots indicating heroes. They may tunnel through to your dungeon, so use the imps to fortify your walls once the right-sized rooms have been dug. ▼ An occasional slap makes imps work harder. ▼ Make sure some warlocks work in the library while others train. Getting access to new rooms (especially the prison) opens up new options for expanding your army.

WipeOut XL

Get ahead fast to avoid your opponents' deadly weapons.

Psygnosis' second 3D-acceleration–only title is the long-awaited sequel to its superlative PlayStation hovercraft racer, WipeOut. This XL version offers some pounding arcade racing, but it fails to make full use of those PC features that leave console gamers envious of their Pentium-owning buddies.

Pure console action

XL supports only Direct3D and PowerVR natively, with the strange omissions of both 3Dfx- and Rendition-specific support (both of which Formula 1 managed). The graphics are smooth as silk and incredibly detailed, with stunning race environments and outrageous (and sometimes frustratingly difficult to navigate) screw-turned track designs. There are three tiers of challenge, each with two tracks (which really isn't very many), along with four different teams turning out their own distinct vehicles. You can race against 12 computer opponents or in a time trial—though either way, the clock is always ticking.

A lack of tournament mode removes any real depth from the individual races, but the gameplay gets a big boost from all the weapons and power-ups on hand. It's not just pure racing: XL offers missiles, rockets, mines, autopilot, and more—making for some serious single-player duels.

The sound effects are awesome, though the soundtrack lacks the PlayStation version's Future Sound of London variety of English techno/dance music. The tunes do have a properly mindless, excessive bass to them, though, which suits the racing just fine.

What comes across most is that WipeOut XL is a straight port of the console version, with the added spark granted by speedy, glitzy graphics accelerators. That said, if you've got the hardware and can accept the limitations of single races and no multiplayer support, it offers some of the most beautiful, dizzyingly fast racing around.

—Jason D'Aprile

WIPEOUT XL

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

B OVERALL

Faster and more furious than its PlayStation cousin, but it needs more depth to make it in the PC world.

PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794
WEB:	www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100, 16MB RAM, 50MB HD, 3D-accelerator card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 4MB video card
STREET PRICE:	$54

Independence Day

Staying alive in later levels takes quick reflexes.

Any pilot will tell you: Some planes are just unforgiving beasts that are hard to fly and easy to die in. Spending time playing Independence Day can provide much the same experience.

On a gameplay level, ID4 is an unassuming, enjoyable arcade game that puts players into the cockpits of the world's premier fighter jets to knock down as many of the nasty aliens as possible. The controls are easy to master on a keyboard or with a joystick, and everything is simple—shoot at the bad guys with cannon or missile fire and then move on to the next endangered Earth city. This ain't no sophisticated sim we're talkin' about.

Keep a finger on the reset button

What soured my experience of ID4 is totally technical in nature—the darn game wouldn't run on most of the systems I installed it on. The bottom line was, I tried it on four different machines, and there were different problems on each one. Be it not liking 3D accelerators, clashing with DirectX drivers, or refusing to accept its supposedly supported MMX variant, getting the game to work with full sound and graphics functionality was a complete nightmare. A non-MMX P200 or P150, without 3D hardware acceleration, seems to be the only vaguely reliable setup.

Multiplayer options boil down to a head-to-head split-screen mode that was also used in the console versions, as well as two-player LAN and Internet modes. Fighting deathmatches is one option, but you can also team up in a joint assault on the aliens.

The problems were a shame, considering that the game itself is quite fun. It certainly looks much better than its console stablemates, but on the PC platform, it's not as good-looking as other 3D-accelerated games.

—George T. Chronis

INDEPENDENCE DAY

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	D+
GRAPHICS :	C
SOUND CHECK:	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	C

C- OVERALL

Fun—once you get it working.

DEVELOPER:	Radical
PUBLISHER:	Fox Interactive 800-454-2637
WEB:	www.foxinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, MMX, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$45

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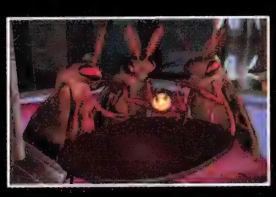
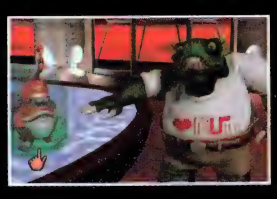
These are definitely not the usual suspects.

THE SPACE BAR™

A "*what*-done-it" mystery adventure CD-ROM by Steve Meretzky.





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Extreme Assault

By Rob Smith

If you can avoid engaging the enemy, do it: Ammo conservation becomes key in the later missions.

Extremely good fun

Guess what, game players? Aliens have invaded Earth and are setting up installations from which they'll unleash all manner of nastiness on poor, unsuspecting humanity. And guess who's got the job of stopping them? Er, that's rhetorical.

First impressions of this helicopter action game (with a tank thrown in partway for variety) are not good. Besides its wholly unoriginal premise, its clunky installation process is DOS-based and doesn't install an icon or shortcut on the desktop—a major oversight for today's games.

Target and destroy anything that's firing at you before taking out the stationary targets.

But all is not lost. Six expansive operation areas subdivided into smaller, intense missions are split seamlessly by cut scenes that advance the story beyond its basic, boring scenario. There are four difficulty levels, although you can only get through the first two areas on Easy mode. You'll need to advance to the Difficult level to get all the way to the end.

The game begins with a cut-scene view of your Sioux AH-23 chopper's cockpit, with a gravelly voice-over mission briefing coming through one of the video screens. This view then fluidly shifts so you're looking out of the cockpit: the HUD appears, and suddenly, you're in control.

And then it hits you: "I don't have a 3D-accelerator card. I don't have an MMX machine. And just look at it. It looks incredible." It's true. While the game supports MMX directly for those with the horsepower, Extreme Assault really does look as good in standard 640-by-480 as many games benefiting from hardware acceleration (and a 3Dfx patch will be available for download shortly). In fact, while MMX gives the frame rate a tidy boost and the explosions are fluffier and rounder, you don't really lose much definition on a standard Pentium. Quite a feat.

A suitably pumped-up soundtrack, enhanced by a really solid bass beat and well-considered sound effects (tinny noises as laser fire hits your vehicle and thunderous explosions when you destroy the bigger alien craft), makes the opening few missions quite an experience.

The progression from mission briefings to action is fairly seamless, but it's not perfect. The game manages to lose some of the immersion factor in the greater story by taking control as you move the short distances from one mission area to another. Once there, though, you'll find carefully designed levels, where different routes can reveal hidden power-up caches and other treats. In addition, the ability to destroy objects such as houses, mining carts, and even trees gives the game a sense of real-world involvement. (You can often uncover power-ups this way, too.)

Shooting static targets such as fuel tanks can cause an explosion that snuffs enemies (and you, if you get too close).

The action is always fast-paced and intense, with puzzle-oriented elements thrown in for variety, plus a futuristic T1 tank that you get to control for a few missions. Three weapon types and effective targeting options make the game move swiftly and effortlessly—you won't find any great sim-like requirements bogging it down.

A healthy multiplayer option on specifically designed levels allows up to four people to compete over a LAN. Some thought has clearly gone into this, as many features can be customized in the game setup. Sadly, it's a one-CD-per-player deal (a demo installation only allows a two-kill limit), but you do get options to fight in tank or chopper modes and on four different types of terrain.

Extreme Assault is uncomplicated, but in this case, that's not a dig. The game is a challenging, well-paced, and well-executed action blast with amazingly good looks.

EXTREME ASSAULT

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B

B+ OVERALL

Simple, beautiful chopper action.

PUBLISHER:	Blue Byte 800-933-2983
WEB:	www.bluebyte.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 40MB HD, 1MB PCI graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 110MB HD, MMX, 2MB PCI graphics, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Do the first run through the opening two areas in Easy mode, then jump to Difficult to try and go all the way. ▼ Use the auto-targeting razor gun against aerial craft. Fly low to the ground and use the more powerful lasers against static targets. ▼ The large, blue-beam–firing robots can be out-ranged. Target them, then hang back on your weapon's range: they can't reach with the beam. ▼ The huge robots on level four are taken pretty easily with the fully powered alien weapon. ▼ You don't get re-energized between missions, so pick up spare weapons and shield energy before moving on. ▼ When in the tank, drive carefully. Falling off the edge of a platform is instant death. ▼ On the portion of the tank level where you need to travel up the ramps to the top, go down into the area in front and shoot the door on the right to reveal a smart bomb. Then, shoot only the doors you need to progress: there are enemies behind others. If you don't need to kill them, don't.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

Elements: New

[Centauri Galaxy]

Fe Fear .0032						
Ex Extinction .0149	**Su** Suffocation .002					
Re Rebellion .081	**It** Intellect .999	**Gm** Global Maps .703	**Mp** Multiplayer .1005	**Sv** Survival .703	**Tc** Tactics .0202	**Ad** Adrenaline .299
Cm Combat .03	**Sa** Sabotage .011	**Ct** Construction 0.000	**Ev** Evacuation .302	**An** Anxiety .0408	**Cd** Command .105	**SE** Seismic Event .505
M Morale .171	**Fi** Fire .139	**Me** Meteor .52	**Vc** Volcano .905	**Wr** Wreckage .408	**Cnf** Confrontation .002	**Ms** Missions .0849

Element of Surprise Element of Danger Element of Destruction Element of Disaster

Dynamix

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Terra>Outpost2

				Sf Science Fiction .371	Tn Testosterone .034	Ae Atmosphere .071
Cn Colonists .03	Rt Real-time .011	A Action 0.000	Cp Competition .302	Ds Disaster .0408	Pn Panic .105	Tf Terraforming .0403
M Magma .312	Me Microbe .110	Ps Psychosis .9054	Fs Fusion .5005	D Danger .0054	Cg Courage .0202	Va Vacuum of space .299
Hg Hunger .03	Mi Mining .091	Di Discovery .081	Rs Research .032	Dn Desperation .217	Bc Balance .1003	Dn Day and Night .055
			Cy Conspiracy .111	St Strategy .1005	Tn Technology .071	Ak Attack .0334

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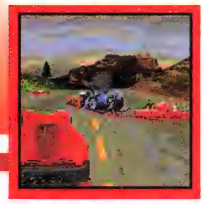
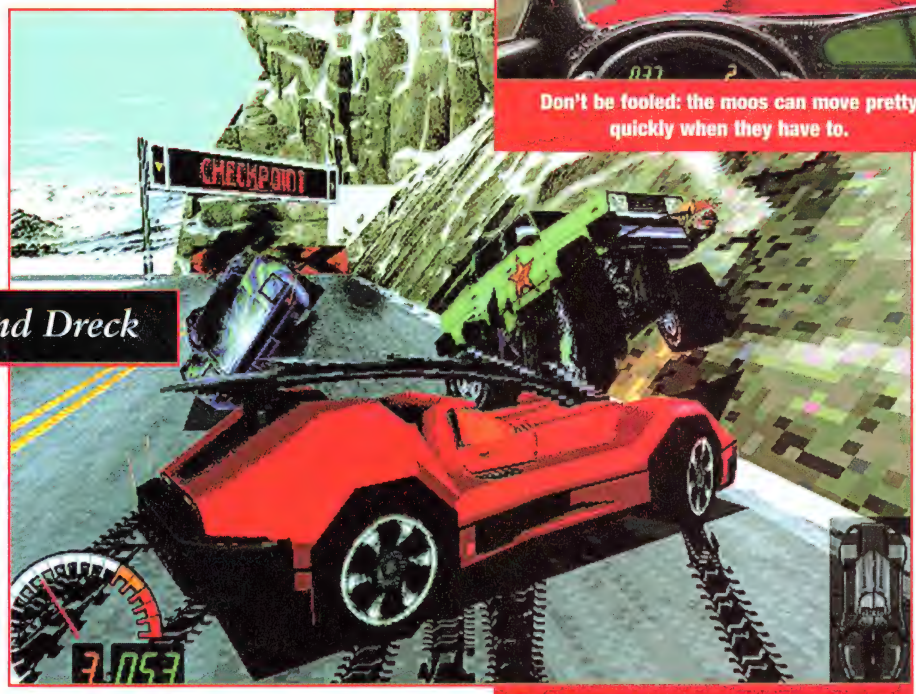


Carmageddon

By George T. Chronis

Don't be fooled: the moos can move pretty quickly when they have to.



Carmageddon's AI is extremely aggressive.

Road and Dreck

The first time Carmageddon crossed my path as a pre-alpha demo, I was enthusiastic about the possibilities of a computer-game homage to the movie *Death Race 2000*. A free-for-all, pedestrians-be-damned race, speed-tweaked cars adorned with all manner of spikes, blades, and other razor-sharp instruments of decapitation? Yeah, bring it on! But compared to the furious thrills of Interstate '76 and Need for Speed II, Carmageddon is not the game it could or should have been.

The problem with Carmageddon is not in its concept, but in its execution. For undiscerning gamers, concept alone may be enough, and they may find Carmageddon a fun and exciting game. But smash-'em-up drivers who've been around will likely find fault with the game's physics model and substandard graphics.

To be fair, Carmageddon should not be compared to true driving simulations such as NASCAR Racing 2 or IndyCar II, which set a higher standard for action-oriented, non-sim racers. Because of these games, when you drop into the seat of a McClaren in Need for Speed II, you get distinct handling and performance characteristics. And while the model in Interstate '76 isn't as well-defined, its control-input response is still effective, and its sense of automobile dynamics is solid.

Carmageddon, by comparison, exhibits none of these control virtues. Whether you're using a joystick or keyboard, commanding your car to bank slightly right or left on hard pavement will result in a spinout. Forget a *controlled* turn or spinout. And too often, when you're using the keyboard, the game ignores sustained pressing of the right or left arrow keys. Players actually get better vehicle control by maneuvering in reverse to line up targets.

Waste the guy with the flag at the beginning of a race and get 1,000 points.

As for Carmageddon's graphics, they're lackluster. Unlike in other action games, objects get more pixelated and blocky the further they are from you—regardless of whether you choose chase view or cockpit view. From even a short distance, opposing vehicles are invisible. In single-player games, this is almost acceptable, since the AI is predictable enough for you to assume when and where you will be attacked. But in multiplayer games, not being able to see your opponents clearly from afar is criminal.

Even worse, Carmageddon's high-detail video mode doesn't live up to its billing. The graphics are better than low-res, but in no way do they compare with the SVGA in NFS II or I-76. It's very likely you'll miss some great gags, such as the sight of cows emptying their bowels just before you splatter them on the pavement.

As for the gameplay, six-player races can be fun, despite the game's shortcomings. But solo races get monotonous after awhile. True, as you advance in rank, you get more demanding courses, opponents, and cars to drive, but due to the poor control physics and indistinct graphics, you never get to exploit the experience.

If running down businessmen, cows, old ladies with walkers, or bikini-clad vixens is up your alley, Carmageddon could yield hours of fun. Everyone else should pass this clunker by.

CARMAGEDDON

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	C-

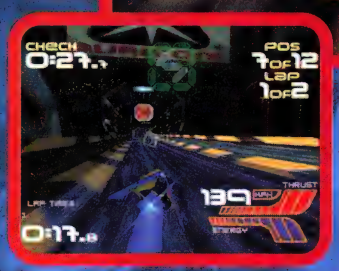
Middling graphics and frustrating controls crash this great concept.

DEVELOPER:	SCI
PUBLISHER:	Interplay Productions 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD/DOS 6.2
REQUIRES:	P90, 8MB RAM, VGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 16MB RAM, SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ Take out multiple pedestrians simultaneously for extra points. ▼ Leave the police van alone. ▼ If your vehicle rolls during a battle, let your opponent continue hitting you. Your car may turn right side up without you having to waste 2,000 credits to do it yourself. ▼ Be wary of black barrels. Some mystery power-ups are actually a pain in the butt.

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

ACCELERATE



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- 3D Labs Permedia
- Rendition Verite
- ATI Rage Mk2

FORMULA 1
- Matrox Mystique
- 3DFx Card
- 3D Labs Permedia
- Rendition Verite

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PC CD ROM

KIDS TO ADULTS
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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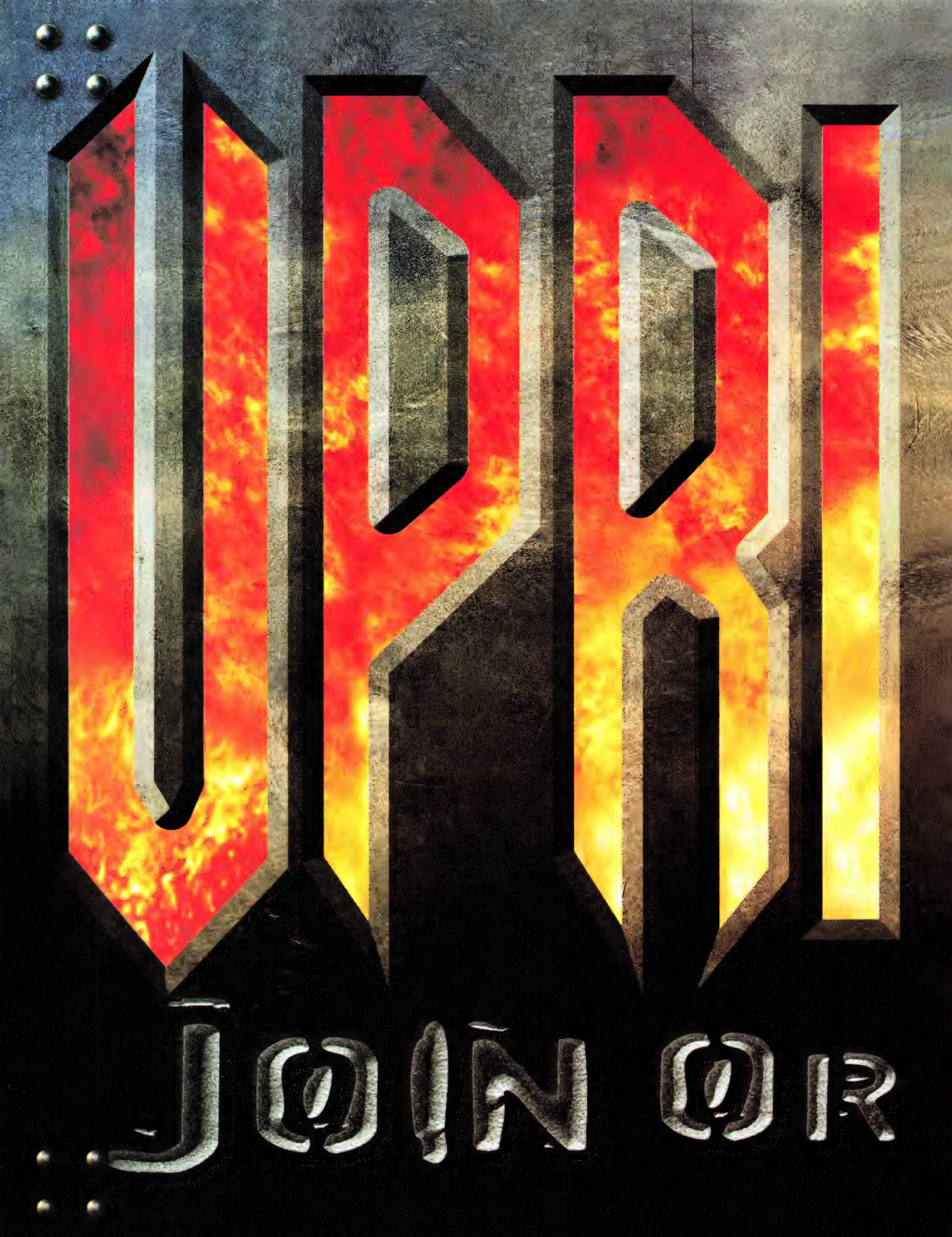
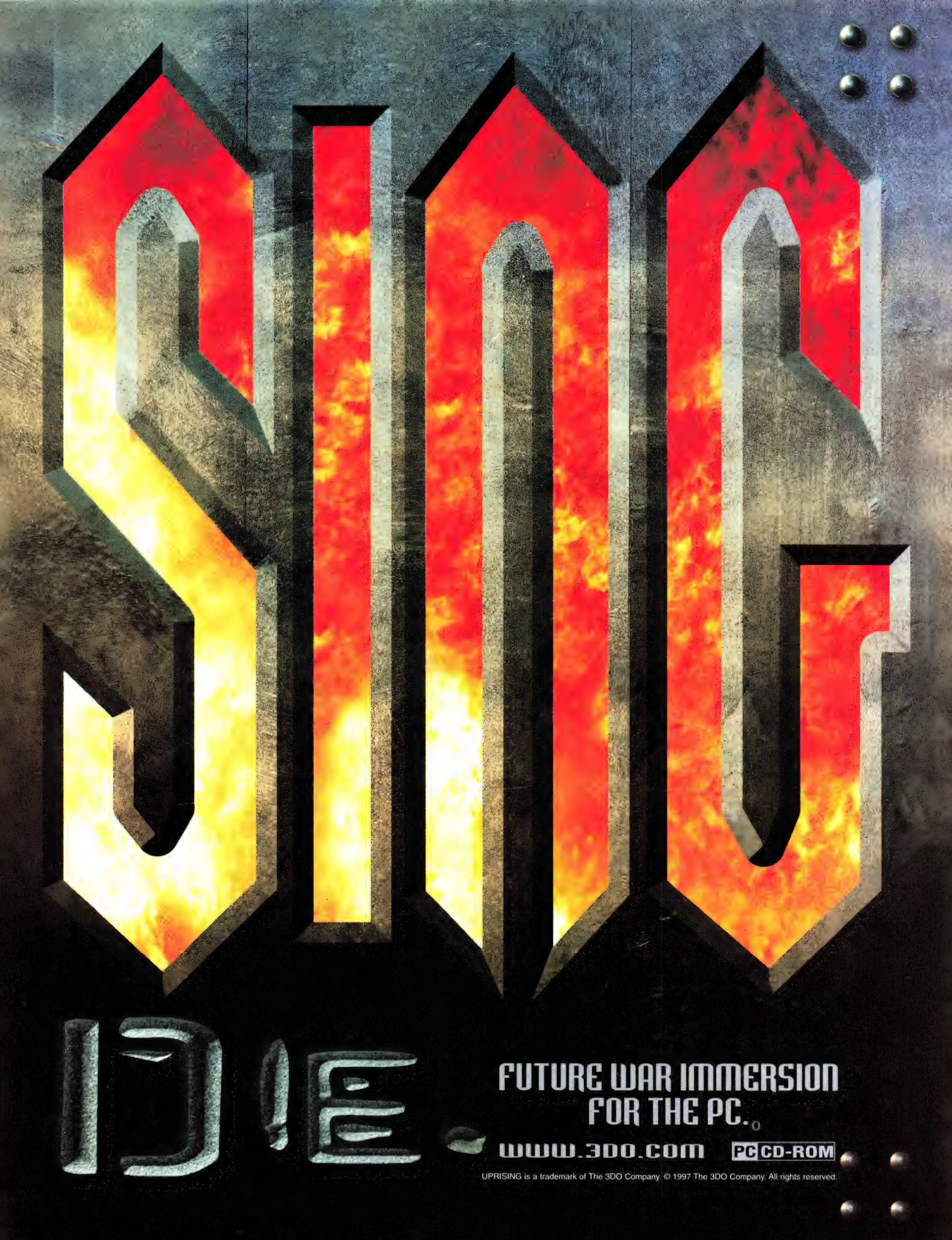

DOOM
JOIN OR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Twinsen's Odyssey

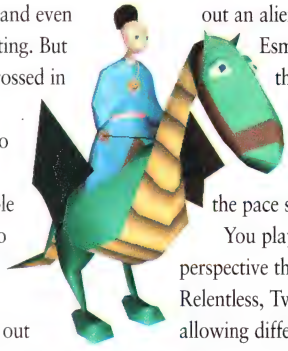
Move over, Mario

By The Player

PC GAMES A LIST

Some would say it's karma. Due to my "All Blood, No Guts" column last issue, in which I chastised developers for focusing on gore and violence in games rather than on gameplay, I was given the task of reviewing Twinsen's Odyssey, which is about as far from Quake and Duke as you can get.

At first, I was more than a little dismayed by Twinsen's overtly cute characters and even more disgustingly cutesy voice-acting. But soon enough, I found myself engrossed in an utterly fascinating 3D world filled with interesting characters to meet and far-out places to visit. And then I discovered I was unable to quit playing, always wanting to uncover what clever plot twist lay around the corner.



Yes, there is at least one game out there that still relies on good old-fashioned gameplay, story, originality, and humor. Twinsen's Odyssey succeeds at all of the above.

Mario Karts meets Babar?

I really shouldn't have been surprised, since it's the sequel to Little Big Adventure—or Relentless, as it was known in the States—which enjoyed smashing critical acclaim. Unfortunately, Twinsen fever didn't sweep US gamers off their feet, and Relentless may be one of the best action/adventure games you've never played.

Once again, you play Twinsen, the zany, big-headed hero who saved planet Twinsun from the diabolical designs of one Dr. Funfrock in Relentless. Those who played that game may remember that the action was quite frenetic from the outset. This time, things start out a bit more slowly, allowing you to get used to controlling Twinsen and to explore his home, Citadel Island, at a leisurely pace.

Twinsen's initial task to cure his friend and steed, Dino-Fly, turns into a rather lengthy quest, through which the game's plot begins to emerge. Turns out an alien race known as the Esmers has landed on Twinsun, and they're not as friendly as they first seemed. You guessed it: Once again it's up to Twinsen to prevent the destruction of his homeworld—and the pace starts to heat up.

You play the game from a third-person perspective that you can shift at any time. As in Relentless, Twinsen has four behavior modes, each allowing different types of actions: Normal, Athletic (use to run), Aggressive (use to kick butt), and Discreet (use to sneak around). Controlling Twinsen efficiently will take practice—and you'll need to get proficient with the keyboard, as joysticks and gamepads are not supported.

You'll find various weapons and spells in your travels, but your basic weapon of choice is a magical ball that you throw at enemies and that returns to you like a boomerang. Deadly as the ball can be, your enemies have lasers and machine guns, and you'll find you'll need to be discreet more often than not to carry the day.

Other than the kiddie voice-acting, the only bone that I feel compelled to pick with the game is that the enemies regenerate when you enter and come out of a building or walk to a new screen and return. So let's say you kick the stuffing out of five gun-toting hot dogs: When you come back, they'll be waiting, and you'll need to beat them all over again—très annoying.

You'll need to get your hands on a wizard's getup before you get an invitation to Zeelich.

It pays to be discreet.

Still, any adventure game on any platform will be hard-pressed to top Twinsen's Odyssey in the visuals and inventiveness categories. The 3D worlds are lush and beautiful, and the characters are truly innovative. Twinsen's Odyssey may very well be the PC's Mario 64.

TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

As inventive an action/adventure game as you'll see for some time.

DEVELOPER:	Adeline Software
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650
WEB:	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 45MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS

▼ Need Kashes? Visit Temple Park and shoot some ducks. ▼ Twinsen's enemies aren't always that bright: if you're discreet you can often sneak right by them, or at least right up to them to get in the first blow. ▼ Remember that the trajectory of the magic ball changes depending on Twinsen's behavior. ▼ Visit Baldino's house on Desert Island ASAP to get the part needed to fix your car—and a radio. ▼ If you enjoy this game, go out and get Relentless! It's been re-released by EA as a classic, and you can get it for less than $20. It still looks and plays great. ▼ Use Enemy Regeneration to collect valuable extra cash and health.

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Faery Tale Adventure II: Halls of the Dead

By Peter Olafson

Worth a 10-year wait

Ten years. It's been *10 years* since David Joiner's Faery Tale Adventure appeared on the Amiga and set the role-playing world on its edge. In 1987, and for some years to follow, there was nothing like FTA for graphic beauty, for sheer size, for beckoning mystery, for musical chops. Even last year, I was still firing it up on an A500 just to listen to it. *[I think you ought to see someone about that.—Ed.]*

If the three brothers look confused, it's 'cause they are early on.

By contrast, the PC follow-up (slated to surface in August under the struggling Ignite label) may seem a comparatively mainstream RPG—a sort of isometric version of Ultima VII.

Nevertheless, FTA II: Halls of the Dead is a charming and expansive role-playing adventure that, upon extended acquaintance, displays many of the virtues of its illustrious parent.

Like FTA, it's founded on the adventures of three brothers loosed upon a vast, strange continent on a quest to slash the existential tires of A Great Evil. Your objective leaks out in dribs and drabs through scrolls and books found en route. The twist: The original game allowed you to control only one brother at a time; FTA II allows you to control all three simultaneously and maneuver them together or separately around the world of Farr—resulting in some interesting possibilities for cooperative puzzles.

With regard to inventory, the original FTA had almost an arcade game's simplicity. Joiner has evidently inherited the Ultima obsession with mundane household objects: musical instruments you can play, tableware you can pocket, cultural and mystical oddities you can puzzle over.

The new game is still big. Really big. After a good 40 hours, there are still plenty of unexplored areas to comb and adventures to unearth. The countryside around the starting town of Pavadis is littered with hideaways, ruins, settlements, and chance encounters with goblins and bandits. Fighting these guys from the isometric perspective is quite manageable using the mouse; I just wish they'd leave the bodies in place a little longer for reference.

Its still-staggering size gives the game a palpable (and very enjoyable) sense of travel. There's an eventfulness about FTA II that surfaces as you search for that break in the thick woods, pause at an unexpected branch in the road and, running for your life, wait for the bit of telltale terrain that says your home base is around the corner. The auto-map is not only guide but enticement; there's so much to see that you'll keep seeking out darkened regions in search of what you might have missed.

Cheap health care from a village healer.

Split up the brothers to achieve certain goals faster.

A few sore spots: The point-and-click interface used for most of the game's interactions can be awkward. For instance, the target for a conversation may walk away while you're talking to him, and often he won't respond even when you thought you dropped the conversation icon right on him. Some character voices are stilted, and exhibit the disconcerting habit of changing accents from one line to the next.

Finally, I wish the music was more distinguished. Joiner's score for the original Amiga version remains one of the best I've heard in any computer game—right up there with Bill Williams' for Sinbad and the Throne of the Falcon *[Definitely make that appointment.—Ed.]*—and FTA II's inoffensive lite-medieval repertoire just isn't in the same league.

But that's OK: I turned it down and kept playing.

FAERY TALE ADVENTURE II

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Despite some niggles, this Tale's compelling.

PUBLISHER:	Ignite 310-312-5705
WEB:	www.ignite.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 4MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Start out by staying close to the safety of the city, and chart an ever-widening circle around Pavadis. ▼ You'll find a number of caves (especially to the west) that can be plundered at your leisure. ▼ Disappointed in your haul at the bottom of the Sorcerer's Lair? There's more to it than meets the eye. Search for an odd-looking section of wall in the final room. ▼ Stand right up against the dragon in the final room of the Amber Castle. His flames will miss you, and you can beat on him with impunity.

The meek shall inherit squat.

Welcome to the blood pits – where you kill, claw, scream and die, battle after battle, to become Warlord of the Dragon Gate. Fight alone or with up to three other players online – either way, you'll encounter hideous creatures attacking from all angles rendered in skull-crushing 3D.

Add in 54,000 different playing combinations and you could play this game forever. Assuming you don't die first.

Developed by:

Drachen Zor™

SOUTHPEAK™ INTERACTIVE

www.southpeak.com

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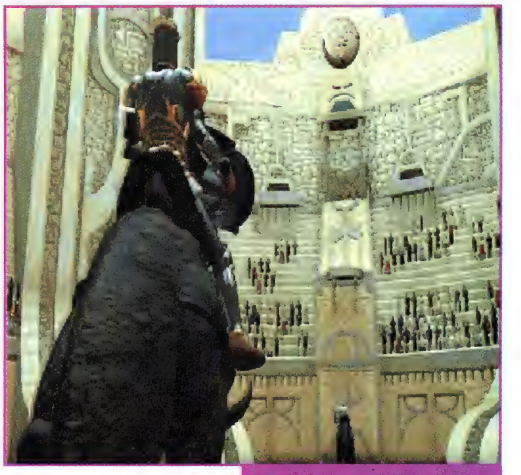
Dragon Lore II

By Barry Brenesal



Daunting locations add a sense of grandeur to the quest.

A graphic adventure with flair

The setting for Dragon Lore II, like its predecessor of several years ago, is the perilous Valley—a hauntingly beautiful place inhabited by the children of the Grand Draconic's Dream. From his nightmare arose the demons, goblins, and orcs, who besiege the Valley Dragons and their allies. The Dragon Knights do battle to preserve the Valley, and newest among these knights is Werner von Wallenrod.

Werner, the hero of the first Dragon Lore, is charged in this new graphic adventure with finding Maraach, the Fire Dragon. Maraach disappeared after his partner, Werner's father, was treacherously slain. Only by finding Maraach will Werner be able to take his rightful place among the handful of Dragon Knights and curb the insolent, evil schemes of Lord Mahyrd Cariachand. (Cariachand's blatant viciousness, obvious from the very beginning, goes unrecognized for some reason by all the game's nonplayer characters and the writer of Dragon Lore's documentation.)

As a graphic adventure, Dragon Lore II lands squarely among the hybrids, which have become increasingly common and popular in recent years. Venturing beyond simple get/combine/use-object formulas, it includes puzzles that require keen observation and a knack for choosing the right friends. In addition, simple combat—both on foot and in joust—with weapons and a few spells enhances the basic style. Although the game is strongly linear, there are multiple solutions to some puzzles, as well as a few plot branches that depend upon Werner's tone of inquiry and the people with whom he communicates.

Atmosphere is truly Dragon Lore II's strong suit. As with the original, this game oozes environment. It's no longer on the cutting edge of technology with its polygnal-fill terrain and objects, but it still manages—with the aid of fine lighting effects and short, deftly interwoven cut scenes—to convey a series of brilliantly defined moods and areas. Cryo's programmers have used their talents to expand the world of the Great Draconic's Valley in size and detail, even adding an excellent soundtrack that avoids the clichés of heavy metal on the one hand and *Star Wars* clones on the other.

Atypical puzzles give Dragon Lore II a challenging edge.

The vocal acting, too, is first-rate, making up for the lack of facial expression on the game's NPCs. The performers avoid the exaggerated theatricality (except when it's demanded in the script) that characterizes the current state of digitized thespians. Would that the sound were up to the acting and soundtrack: it's poorly compressed, losing part of the high frequencies and resulting in lifelessness. The lack of mouth-syncing may annoy some people more than it does me—but then, I'm a fan of foreign films, and Dragon Lore II's visuals were designed to fit its original, French-language version.

Don't come to Dragon Lore II expecting a smoothly perfect product. Without meaning to wax patriotic in the slightest (the land that birthed novelist Anatole France and composer Gabriel Faur has few more loyal friends than yours truly), I'd say this game lacks some of the polish of much American gaming software. Several cut-sequence transitions are too abrupt, and there are numerous moments throughout when the color registers shift briefly but startlingly. In short, the vision and imagination are there, but the edges of Werner von Wallenrod's world are a bit frayed through sloppiness.

That aside, Dragon Lore II convinces. It's decidedly different from standard graphic-adventure fare. With enormous visual atmosphere, a cleverly paced, well-realized plot, a simple interface, and good graphics, music, and acting, it's easy to lose yourself in this fantasy world.

Joining the Dragon Knights is no easy task.

DRAGON LORE II

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

This French graphic adventure is high on mood, with fewer traditional puzzles than is typical of the genre.

PUBLISHER:	Cryo Interactive 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.cryo-interactive.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 50MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS

▼ After picking up a box or bag, click on your inventory. If the item vanishes, don't worry. Its immediate effect is to increase the number of spaces you have in your inventory, available via the arrows on the right side of the screen. ▼ Don't forget to grab the Ring of Life when the Archmage offers it to you! Otherwise, you won't survive the transition into the second chapter. ▼ Tapping the spacebar will speed up the moody, but occasionally slow, movement down corridors. ▼ When you're in the Armory, grab all the weapons and shields. You can sell the surplus later in town. ▼ Return to characters with whom you've spoken previously. Depending upon your subsequent actions, they may have more to relate. ▼ Save frequently, starting in the second chapter (the crash in the swamp). You're under time constraints, and there are monsters around just looking for a nice dish of Braised Hero. ▼ Some vegetation can think and speak—probably better than you. Give that tree a try. ▼ Hellaynea is an excellent trainer.

Atlantis: The Lost Tales

By Peter Olafson

Every detail has been taken care of in the exquisite backdrops.

Simply put, Atlantis: The Lost Tales is about the best-looking graphic adventure I've ever seen.

You're Seth, the newest of the Atlantean queen's companions. Barely have you arrived at the palace when other companions burst in to announce that the queen has been abducted and her accompanying companions killed.

Her consort, who looks like the Phantom of the Opera (bad sign) and sounds like Peter Ustinov, is conducting an investigation that seems more like a cover-up. The guards won't let you wander, and even your "allies" are setting up ambushes. Naturally, it's all a plot, and, naturally, it falls to Seth—one of few faithful subjects in a world of trouble—to restore her majesty to power.

Unearthing a lost world is just the first surprise.

Much of the fun in this four-CD epic is in the game engine itself. Most of the time you move from location to location in smooth (albeit scripted) scrolling. That's not a big deal in itself—a lot of games can do it—but I've yet to see one do it while achieving this spectacular level of detail and realism, allowing you to take it all in with the flick of a wrist. You can smoothly rotate 360 degrees while simultaneously looking up and down a good 60 degrees. My trip through the Atlantean jungle was the closest I've come to feeling like I was inside a photograph.

To enhance the mood, the music is even better than the artwork, if that's possible—one of the most evocative scores I've heard since The Labyrinth of Time. *[He's on that trip again.—Ed.]*

Happily, Atlantis' designers have done a great job of keeping up the pace set by the graphics and music. After a slow start, you'll find Seth hopping from frying pan into the campfire into a forest fire. There's no downtime and no huge cut scenes (none needed when the whole game feels like a cut scene), and because most of the conversations are optional, it's just as chatty as you wanna be.

A lost world of adventure

While Seth's a touch bland—in the manner of all computer-game leading men—character and even charm have been worked into most other people. One of your fellow companions is downright spooky. And the queen, when finally rescued, makes you turn around while she's changing into the disguise you've provided and bristles if you turn back before she's ready.

The game's challenges are rational, tied closely to the player's resources and story, and without too many disembodied puzzles-for-puzzles'-sake. A particularly nice example: When you have to find your way through the palace library to rendezvous with your lone ally, you must avoid stepping on creaky floor panels and incapacitate the guards.

You'll need to solve the puzzle of the orrery to reach the village beside the palace.

OK, OK, so it's not the most intricate of adventures. Atlantis pretty much consists of the age-old find-object/find-hotspot/use-object routine, without the interesting role-playing and strategy twists of a Dragon Lore. A useful feature, though, is that it only puts Save Game files (it saves automatically at certain points) on your hard drive.

I'd like to see more incidental animations to help bring the gorgeous scenery to life. And the characters, while sometimes frighteningly realistic—it's something about the eyes—often have the look of marionettes. Yes, it's cool that their lips move more or less in sync with what they're saying (using Cryo's OMNI-SYNC system), but they're the weirdest-looking lips I've ever seen.

But if you can live with weird lips and a few traditional graphic-adventure irritants, this Atlantis won't be lost on you.

ATLANTIS: THE LOST TALES

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Ooh-la-la graphics and a great score make this a captivating adventure.

PUBLISHER:	Cryo Interactive 800-468-3775
WEB:	www.cryo-interactive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 1MB SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 2MB SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ To open the secret passage from the palace to the village, you'll need to adjust the orrery so it aligns the Earth, moon, and sun pointing down and to the left. ▼ However, reaching the tavern is still tricky, as an assassin is waiting in the alley beside the building. The trick here is to climb up to the balcony of an adjoining building, take the flowerpot off the railing, and bean him with it. (The timing here is a little delicate; aim for the side door as he approaches it.) ▼ Take his knife. This experience should give you a taste of what to expect inside. The only escape is to make for the balcony at the back of the room.

ADVENTURE

D.A.: Pursuit of Justice

By Daniel Morris

The defendant is guilty. Now prove it

D.A.: Pursuit of Justice casts you in an FMV adventure as a rookie assistant D.A. assigned to Los Angeles County. Your crusty, wizened mentor is the LA district attorney, Frank Jarrett, who still drives the 1968 Lincoln Continental he bought when he had your job. His point: It ain't about money and fancy cars. It's about punishing the guilty.

And darn it, that's a game I can get into. Your first case, The Sunset Boulevard Deuce, is a fairly straightforward chance for you to learn the process and cut your teeth on a drunken-driving conviction for a loser who smashed his car into a bus stop. Subsequent add-on cases will up the ante to theft and murder. (D.A. contains three full cases, with another three in the works.)

The bulk of the game is played from your Legal Notebook, which has a map of all the relevant locations (crime scene, jailhouse, lab, etc.) and includes reference law and penal codes for you to check as you gather evidence. Scan incriminating evidence and order tests in the crime lab for fingerprints, hair and fiber samples, ballistics tests, tire-tread matching, and more. Each bit you gather is another nail in the defendant's coffin.

But gathering the evidence is just step one. Then the real work begins. By organizing evidence, witnesses, and other information, you begin to establish the case for the crime committed and for identifying the defendant as its perpetrator. You'll also need to hit the legal library to bone up on your law: the court battle will require deft maneuvering, once the defense attorney gets his hooks into you.

Otherwise, this pretrial phase is the least interesting, as assembling your gathered information and organizing it into your Case Constructor is a mostly cut-and-paste operation—hampered only by the unbelievably imminent deadline. A lot of this work is incredibly easy, though. Whenever I needed to pick the suspect out of a lineup, I just referred to the photos on the game box, which had the mug shots.

Scan evidence from the police station to use later in court.

Gang rivalry turns deadly in the seedy side of LA.

The fun begins once court is in session and you have to present your case before the jury. The evil defense attorney, Victor Blaine, is a crafty lizard who will exploit your every mistake, often adding an extra humiliating twist to an oversight. He'll object if you're on thin ice, and then you'll be called upon by the judge to present valid legal cause for your statement or a witness' testimony. If you haven't done your homework, your case will be thrown out in a hurry.

D.A. is at its best when it goes for the nitty-gritty, detail-oriented chess match of the witness examinations. You have to simultaneously fend off Blaine's objections and carefully inject objections into his questioning. Don't let him speculate, badger, or lead.

While it's hardly *Law & Order*, D.A. does feature some of the best FMV acting in a long while. Tony Plana is very believable as an LA cop (you'll recognize him from small roles in several Oliver Stone films), and other credible performances are turned in by Jack Shearer as Jarrett, and Kelly Hu (of TV's *Sunset Beach*) as the devastated witness to a gangland execution in The Rat Tattoo Murder.

But the star of the show is Dana Gladstone as Blaine, a nemesis so vile and loathsome that you'll keep playing and playing just to wipe the twisted smirk off his face. He's the lawyer all good young prosecutors are eager to decimate, and he makes D.A.—despite its deficiencies and low replay value—worth running through, especially for fans of courtroom drama.

The Case Constructor is where you assemble the evidence against your suspect.

D.A.: PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B

B- OVERALL

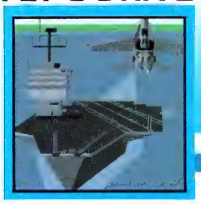
MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Courtroom maneuvering that makes a case for FMV.

PUBLISHER:	Legacy Software 310-823-2423
WEB:	www.legacysoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 8MB RAM, 15MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, 1MB SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 2MB SVGA
STREET PRICE:	$50

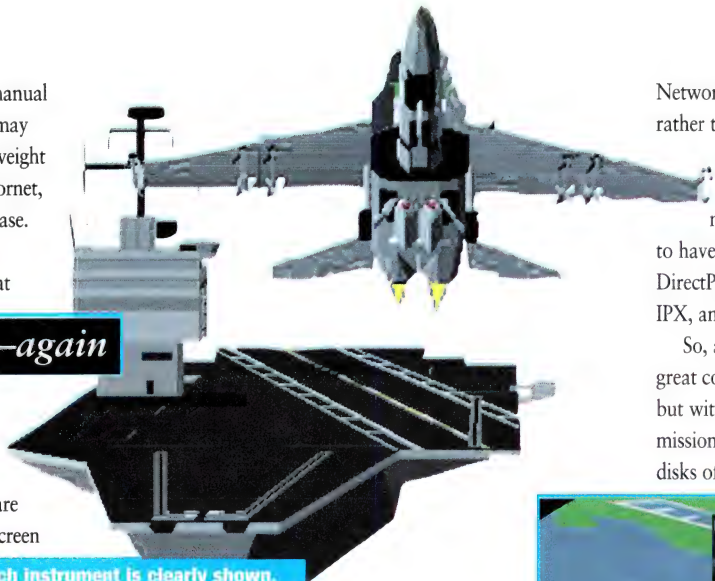
TIPS

▼ Big tip that could save you an acquittal: A cop doesn't need a warrant to search a suspect's car if there's probable cause (e.g., the officer believes the driver is in possession of stolen property). ▼ Harbor no doubts about the relevance of evidence before submitting it in court. If it's irrelevant, you'll look really bad. ▼ Blaine is always theatrical, but that doesn't necessarily mean he's objectionable. Let him caper until he starts to speculate, bully, or denounce your witnesses. You won't have to wait long.



F/A-18 Hornet 3.0

By Dominic Silk



The rather slim operations manual that accompanies this sim may have you expecting a lightweight interpretation of the F/A-18 Hornet, but fortunately, that's not the case. Indeed, what we have here is a fairly solid combination of great

Desert Storm—again

cockpit detail, decent terrain graphics, and an enjoyable flight model.

Hornet's training missions are backed up by a number of onscreen lessons, each using a combination of chalkboard graphics and a small window showing a video replay. When you're finished with training, you can select from 28 tour-of-duty missions, all set in Kuwait and arranged in groups of four. You select a mission, then fly it; should you survive, you get to load the next group. An Instant Action option allows you to fly any of the 28 missions without risking the career status of your pilot. However, the relatively small number of missions means your "in-sim" time is sorely restricted.

Each instrument is clearly shown.

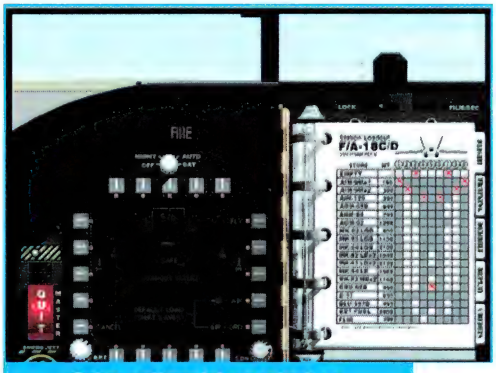
As you'd expect, many of the missions are carrier-based, and attention to detail means that you need to taxi to the catapult and engage the launch bar before you can take off. The cockpit instrumentation is beautifully displayed—especially in the high-resolution 1024-by-768 mode—and the radar screen is particularly well done, with all essential information in view without needing to look down. The HUD also displays Radar Warning Receiver (RWR) information: lines around the outer edge of the HUD represent various threats, and each line is coded to indicate its type (aircraft, SAM, AAA, or other generic radar type). As the threat level increases, the line becomes longer, extending toward the center of the HUD—thus allowing you to prioritize and locate the threats.

If carrier landings aren't your thing, you can select a land base, or you can make use of the Automatic Carrier Landing System (ACLS). This system is linked to one of the autopilot modes, and it requires only that you manage the throttle to keep the velocity vector sitting on the end of the deck. The rest is handled for you. Even if you decide to do the whole thing yourself, it isn't all that difficult to achieve a good landing, since the routines are pretty forgiving. The air-traffic landing officer will give you directions and tell you to go around if you are badly out of position.

For the most part, the graphics are in the Su-27 Flanker style: crisp objects built from polygons, but very little detail in the terrain itself. Network play has been implemented as team play rather than as cooperative missions. Up to four players (two on each side) can fly in one of six variations of "capture the flag" missions, and only the server is required to have the CD loaded. Networking is based on DirectPlay, and the game also supports modem, IPX, and TCP/IP connections.

So, a mixed bag, this one. Hornet 3.0 offers great cockpit graphics and a good flight model, but with no campaign and a limited number of missions, it may have a short lifespan on the hard disks of seasoned flyers.

The look may be basic, but the flight model makes up for it.



Setup options let you stock up before missions.

F/A-18 HORNET 3.0

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**B-**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

Takes off and lands safely, but never really soars.

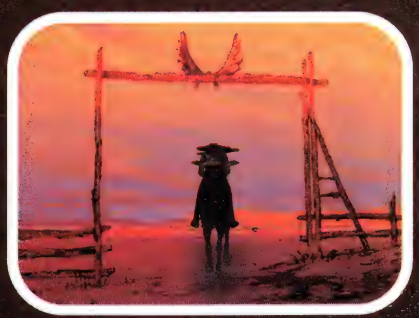
PUBLISHER:	Graphic Simulations 972-386-7575
WEB:	www.graphsim.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ SAMs can't be padlocked, so they can be hard to handle. Avoid them by flying above 50,000 feet or below 100 feet—even lower if you want to use your radar. ▼ You can fool 2A radar-guided missiles by turning on your ECM and using the threat-warning bars in the HUD to keep the missile at your 3 o'clock or 9 o'clock while dumping chaff and flares every few seconds. ▼ Keep an eye on your wingman: sometimes he goes off on his own. When he does, issue a formation command to bring him back and retain package integrity.

OUTLAWS.™ A GAME OF THE OLD WEST. WHEN GUN CONTROL

The gameplay's packed with strategy, puzzles, and plenty of gun fighting action.

First person shooter action lets you set your sights and pull the trigger.



After you gun down the last outlaw, you'll ride off triumphantly into the sunset.

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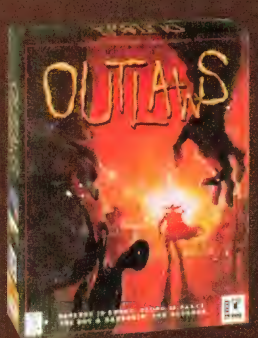

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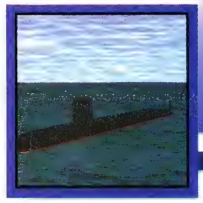
688(I) Hunter/Killer

By Daniel Morris



Make repairs and stock up on stores and weapons before embarking.

Jane. It's an unlikely name to equate with a tradition of excellence among students of modern military force. The fine work of Jane's Information Group has carried over into Jane's Combat Simulations, the developer that brought us last year's stunning AH-64D Longbow. The

Dive into an intense naval experience

Information Group stands as the leader in chronicling and commenting upon the rise of the world's modern armies and powers, and it puts that authority to good use in these computer sims.

Jane's provides you with a complete online database of friends and foes, like the deadly Akula sub.

Now, Jane's all-seeing eye (or should we say periscope) has settled on the underwater realm of the 688(I) attack submarine. Sonalysts, Inc., 688(I) Hunter/Killer's design team, worked on simulations of the real thing at the US Navy's War College, and the authenticity of their labors is evident on every game screen. The 688(I) is pure dynamite, and you've got control of every knob, mate, and page in the playbook.

Getting acclimated to the sub with a careful walkthrough from bow to stern is a relatively simple process, thanks to comprehensive in-game documentation. This is so much more fun than plodding through a manual. Instead, you sign on as captain and hit the books onscreen, from the comfort of your CO quarters. The game provides very instructive tutorials, training missions, and introductory scenarios to wean you off land and into confident command of the sub.

Bearing, speed, and depth are handled from the main control panel.

Granted, it isn't as simple as painting white on rice. The sub is a product of its times: tremendously complex. Its many systems need to be understood, if not mastered, and that'll demand a working knowledge of the boat's hydraulics, ventilation, atmosphere control, propulsion, weapons, sensors, navigation, and so on. It all comes into play in even less-than-extreme settings, so you'll need to crack the books if you're going to last at the helm.

The best thing about 688(I) Hunter/Killer is the engrossing political scenarios that Jane's has so seamlessly woven into the gameplay fabric. Your missions will take you roaming up and down and all over the globe, in every imaginable theater of operations. Some missions are as sneaky and simple as inserting a SEAL team onto a Cuban beach undetected. In the thick of war, you may be asked to slip alongside a foreign coast and unleash a devastating Tomahawk cruise-missile attack against land-based targets. The threat of engagement from patrolling aircraft, surface ships, and other subs is always apparent.

Another nice touch is the campaign mode, which allows you to complete varied assignments in different theaters of operation, advancing in rank to pursue greater and greater challenges. It's rewarding to sit back with your ship's logs after a dozen missions and relive past glories.

Being a highly realistic simulation, 688(I) runs the risk of losing the less devoted military-sim fans. As in real life, there are some long, inactive stretches. (The manual suggests that, for the most part, you not use the time-compression feature. They mean it. Much of the game's accuracy and feel get lost when you step outside the real time frame.) Another problem the game suffers from is the fact that modern naval engagement, while certainly as nerve-wracking as any life-and-death situation, is not very visceral. You kill targets from a distance and, for the most part, never see a glimpse of your handiwork.

But in a game this engulfing, watching that sonar contact disappear is as satisfying as gibbing someone with an RPG. Anyone who enjoys a good, meticulously realized simulation will be wowed by 688(I) Hunter/Killer. With eight players going at it over network/modem, there should be much fun to be had stalking the silent seas.

688(I) HUNTER/KILLER

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B

Aficionados of modern naval power will have a field day in this boat.

DEVELOPER:	Jane's Combat Simulations
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 12MB HD, 1MB PCI video card, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 95MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS ▼ Unless you're in a big rush, keep your screws turning at a speed of 5 knots or slower. You're very tough to hear when you're moving that slow. ▼ Use the thermal layer for further protection from sonar detection. Surface craft can be evaded by slipping beneath the layer, and enemy subs can be evaded by cruising just above it. ▼ Cavitation is your worst enemy (besides maybe a torpedo). Pay close attention to ensure that you're not making any bubbles and attendant noise. ▼ Best way to pick up bad guys: Deploy your towed array and make slight, 20-degree turns in direction at several-minute intervals. Be sure to change your baffles (silent spots in your wake) to check for enemies tailing you.

Triple Play 98

By Daniel Morris

PC GAMES A LIST

Baseball takes a lot of hard knocks these days. Washed-up former national pastime. As boring as watching paint dry. Populated by whiners and ingrates. The list goes on and on, and it seems to lead to the conclusion that the more frenetic, TV-friendly sports (like basketball and hockey) have all but consigned the Grand Old Game to the proverbial ash-heap of history.

Well, if that's the case, nobody told Electronic Arts. EA Sports has crafted the most enjoyable, playable, and—dare we say it—exciting baseball series yet with its Triple Play line, and the 98 edition raises the bar even higher for its many competitors. Of course, this rockin' rendition of the American tradition is brought to you by our northern neighbors at EA Sports Canada, but who's keeping track, eh?

The main problem with last year's Triple Play 97 was its

Baseball in a box

lack of managerial/sim features, which left you, essentially, with a great arcade game. EA has addressed this with a slew of statistical features in the 98 update. Season stats are tracked in every major category, and with trades, a general manager suite, and an expansion draft for the new clubs in Arizona and Tampa, there will be plenty for stat-hounds to keep themselves occupied. Not quite the encyclopedic command of your league that FPS: Baseball supplies, but plenty nevertheless.

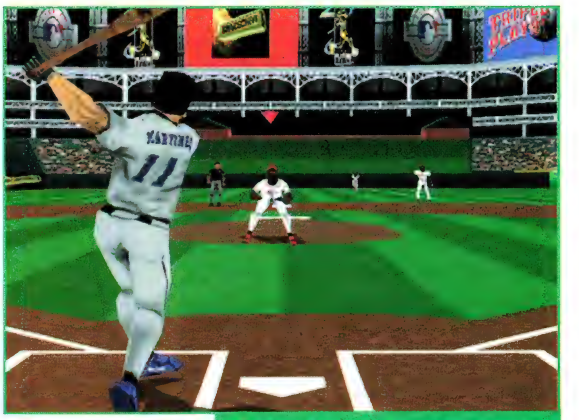
The real difference is on the field, where Triple Play 98 is simply a blast. The 3D engine is surprisingly fast given its dynamic camera, which moves at high speeds when tracking a line drive or ground ball, never skipping a beat (at least, not on my P200). If you're still trying to play EA Sports games on a low-end machine, it's time to pass a municipal bond for a new stadium. The reward is worth it. Textured jerseys, names, numbers, faces—the detail is fantastic.

Better yet, attention is paid to such things as individual batter stances and pitching styles. All are immediately recognizable. The animations are thoroughly convincing, with player-captured dives, shuffles, throws, and even cleat-tapping in the batter's box. It's all completely authentic.

Gameplay itself is less concerned with dugout chess warfare and sticks to stickball. You'll play through nine innings in half an hour, easy. It's the little touches that sell the game: watching outfielders climb walls to make a grab, watching infielders smash into each other under a pop-up, watching the shortstop jump over a sliding base-runner while turning the double-play throw at second base—this stuff just plays wonderfully.

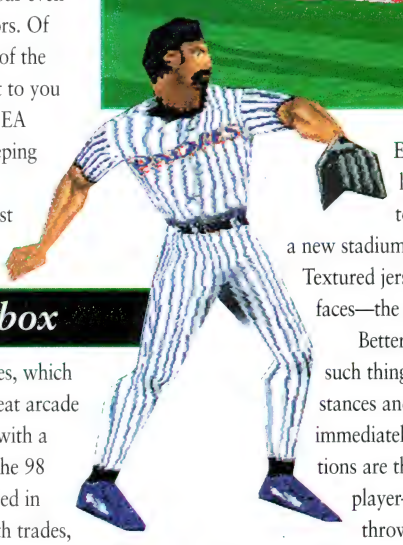
Triple Play was meant for the multiplayer experience, and I highly recommend finding a Gravis GrIP to share with a buddy. Few sports titles are as much fun to face off across. Less interesting are the network/modem options, but it's good to have them there.

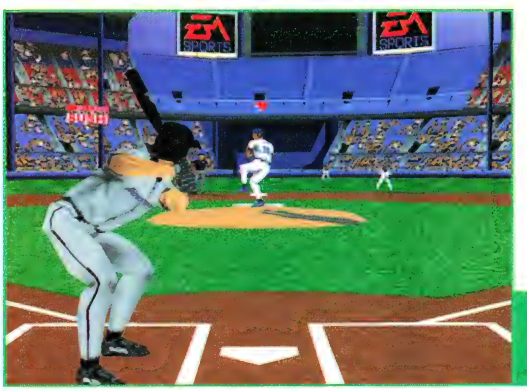
The basic choice baseball fans have to make in the face of this season's glut of titles is between eye-catching playability and deep, involving simulations. Triple Play 98 is almost purely the former, despite its sim features. Sierra's FPS Baseball is less graphically interesting and not as much of a hoot to play, but it's more complex and immersive as a sports sim. Those interested in a bat-swingin', Big League Chew–chompin', multiplayer delight will need look no further than Triple Play 98. It's quite a pastime.



Textured jerseys, numbers, names, faces—no detail is spared.

Outstanding player animations even come adorned with shadows.





Individual stances are accurately modeled, as are pitchers' throwing styles.

TRIPLE PLAY 98

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

Arcade-flavored baseball at its best.

PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.ea.com/easports
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 5MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, 120MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$53

TIPS

▼ The change-up is a surprisingly effective weapon against a human opponent. Don't be afraid to let one hang there after a heater and draw a quick swing from the batter.

▼ Have faith in the pitcher's ability to play his position. On grounders to first base, snag the ball with your first baseman and then toss to the pitcher for the play at the bag. You usually don't see him on your screen until you make the toss, but don't panic—he's there.

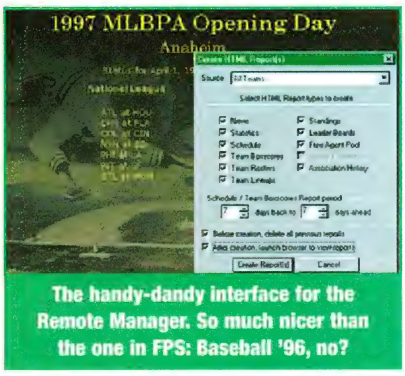
FPS: Baseball Pro '98

By Peter Olafson

PC GAMES A LIST

This time, Front Page Sports: Baseball connects solidly. If the '96 edition fell slightly short of the seats, the '98 version ('97 having been passed over) is a blue-streak line drive that sends the hecklers in the back row of the bleachers running for cover.

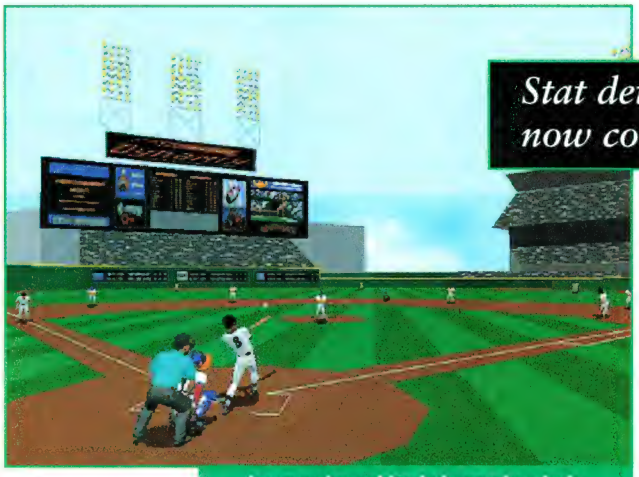
It's essentially a tuned-up version of last year's championship franchise, and everything that made the prior version such a sweet experience is still here: the persuasive game physics, the dense fabric of stats, the vivid graphics and sound effects, the infectious atmosphere, and the all-things-to-all-people thoroughness of the simulation's concept.



The handy-dandy interface for the Remote Manager. So much nicer than the one in FPS: Baseball '96, no?

Which is not to say that this is just the '96 version with a new set of stats (it includes end-of-season '96 stats and preseason '97 rosters). While no real major features have been added, many have been improved. The designers have replaced the batting and pitching module with one that appears to more accurately reflect the tendencies of individual players. The AI has a sharper edge and can be edited (why no proper editor, though?). Batting practice is now entirely open: you can match up any batter and pitcher in any ballpark. And the physics model now includes altitude (which gives interesting results if you plunk Ken Griffey Jr. down in stratospheric Colorado). The arcade game has become more accessible, and players now have numbers on their uniforms.

But the most significant improvement, in my mind, is the Remote Manager tool, which not only allows team owners to play out their games on their own machines and then upload the results via the Internet to include in the league's cumulative totals, but also automates many of the tasks that make chairing a league more of a chore than a pleasure. This feature appears to be a solid advancement, and I hope Sierra expands upon it in future editions.



Stat detail is a given; now comes the action

Improved graphics help create a truly immersive ballpark experience.

Moreover, the little irritants that diluted my experience of FPS: Baseball '96 have been largely excised. Everything seems to run faster—especially under the new Fast Sim mode—and more smoothly. The AI oddities appeared fewer and farther between—though I did notice that base runners consistently failed to attempt to break up a double play, and that managers seemed slow to warm up relievers. The occasional twitchiness of the graphics has been subdued. Plus, they've cleaned up the cluttered look of the last edition and added a proper 191-page manual to supplement the docs-on-disc.

Admire the lifelike physics at your leisure via replay.

Finally, at $19.95 (after a $10 rebate for '96 owners), it's also a great bargain.

In short, I'm hard put to find anything to complain about. If pushed, I suppose I'd ask for front-office mechanics (e.g., dealing with contract negotiations, free agency, and salary caps). The interface still strikes me as slightly opaque—and, despite familiarity with FPS: Baseball '94 and '96, I still find myself hunting in the docs for features I should be able to find on my own. I'm also a little tired of finding the stands generically full for each game.

And while the game ran without a hitch on a 32MB P200 system equipped with Sierra's own Screamin' 3D card, I couldn't get it to work consistently on a P200-MMX system with Diamond's Stealth 3D card.

In other words, the bums in the bleachers are definitely on the run, but the windshields out in the parking lot are still safe. At least, for another year.

FPS: BASEBALL PRO '98

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A-

***The* baseball game.**

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707
WEB:	www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, 32MB RAM, 50MB HD, 2MB PCI graphics, 4x CD-ROM drive, 28.8 modem
STREET PRICE:	$30 (not including $10 rebate for '96 owners)

TIPS ▼ The best available player isn't always the best player for you. Draft for your ballpark; after all, you'll play half your games there. ▼ If you have a cavernous Astroturf outfield that turns singles to doubles and doubles to triples, go for range on the defense. ▼ If you have a short porch down the line, line up a club to pump homers in that direction.

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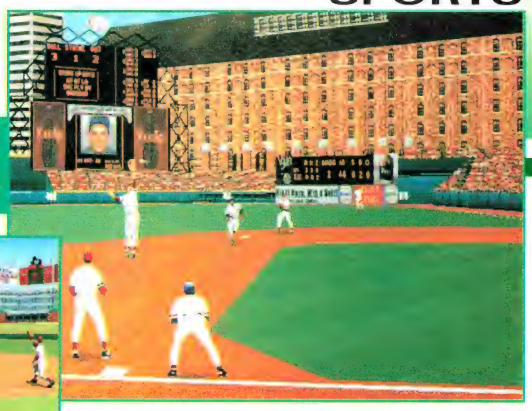
Tony La Russa Baseball 4



Tony 4 just isn't as crisp as its predecessor.

My wife doesn't particularly care for baseball. "It's so boring," she whines. "Every game looks the same."

I don't agree—baseball is in the details, after all. That's why she'd say Tony La Russa Baseball 4 is too similar to its predecessor, Tony 3, while I'd argue that the tweaks and overall look added by developer Stormfront Studios make some difference. On the other hand, they're not the wholesale differences a game needs two years down the road.

The look of Tony 4 brings the game into the modern 3D era, with motion-captured players that resemble real sluggers and hurlers. But players look out of whack with much of the rest of the game: crowd environments are merely a swirl of colors, and plays in the field are a little too reminiscent of the cartoon style of Tony 3. That game's play choices, control panel, and AI were quite good, and Tony 4 hasn't lost any of its easy-to-play factors.

Stranded at second base

One of the two chief enhancements in this version is an improved ability to play head-to-head; it also adds modem and network options for head-to-head play—but not Internet play. The other is the ability to view the game from any camera position, which is a nice shift from existing baseball games. Rosters are up-to-date as of opening day 1997 and are customizable, and you can edit player stats easily.

However, the game has a too-familiar feel that's exemplified by La Russa's video tips (his cap's different now that he's managing St. Louis, but his tips still don't help you play this game) and by reusing voice-overs from semi-retired broadcasters Lon Simmons and Hank Greenwald. Not that using those consummate pros is a problem. But the third broadcaster is the great Mel Allen, who's unfortunately been dead for more than a year (he laid down these tracks for Tony 3). It's still a fun play, but not enough has moved forward in this game. *—Don St. John*

LA RUSSA BASEBALL 4

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	**B-**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B+**

Some good updates, but the overall feel's a bit tired.

DEVELOPER:	Stormfront Studios
PUBLISHER:	Maxis 800-336-2947
WEB:	www.maxis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$45

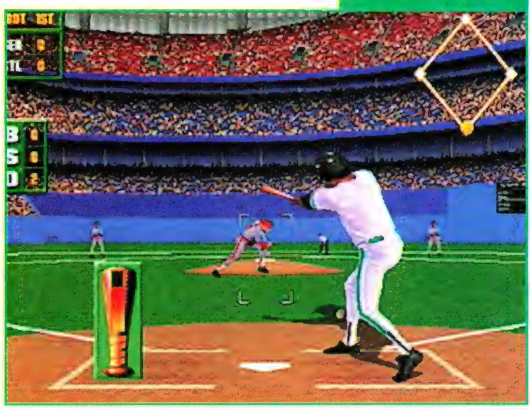
Grand Slam

Diamond in the rough

I react to Virgin's Grand Slam pretty much the way I respond to the New York Mets. The more I see of it, the more I like it. And yet I'm not quite smitten enough to consider myself a fan.

There are a lot of little bits and pieces to like. This action-oriented baseball game has catchers who give you signals while you're on the mound, and a pitching mechanism that sensibly adds skill to a task that traditionally plays more like ordering from a fast-food restaurant. The game also keeps a record book of your team's best performances. In league mode, it allows you to vote for All Stars at the break and hands out awards at season's end. The sound is crisp and brilliant throughout, and the game manages to place video-taped generic players against the backdrop of sumptuously drawn stadiums without looking cheesy.

Smart pitching, smart swinging.



But while the stadiums are laid out in 3D, my impression was that the ball's movements were scripted, rather than relying on game physics. It tends to do things the same way repeatedly. For instance, I far too often found an infielder grabbing a line drive and then tagging out a passing base runner for a double-play. Also, awkward key combos that can't be reconfigured pretty much require you to use a gamepad.

And the announcer! He'll occasionally drop a blooper, like references to getting a rally going...in the top of the first inning. Happily, he sometimes has the presence of mind to correct himself. "He got all of that one," he bellows, as the ball heads toward the seats. "Well, he got most of it," he amends, when it's caught on the warning track.

That may be funny, but the various technical issues during installation caused problems on a variety of machines. And the occasional crashes upon quitting were irritating, too.

Grand Slam certainly has some positives, but in the end, it's none too inspiring. *—Peter Olafson*

GRAND SLAM

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	C-
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	**C**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B-**

Decent action-oriented baseball—with some annoying flaws.

DEVELOPER:	Burst
PUBLISHER:	Virgin Interactive Entertainment 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.vie.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, 1MB graphics card
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 100MB HD, 4MB graphics card, 3D accelerator
STREET PRICE:	$60

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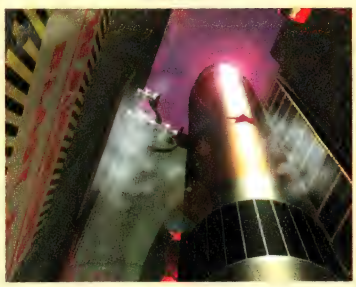

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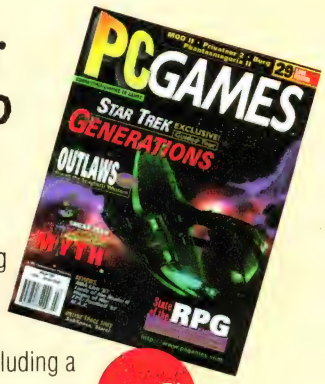

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Recommended: **Windows 95**, Pentium 90, 16 MB RAM, 28.8 bps modem, 2X speed CD-ROM

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Front Page Sports: Golf

By Christopher Tou

Standing on the 15th tee, 10 shots down, I squint into the sun, searching for the flag. After determining the distance and wind direction, I address the ball. The club swings forward. On my follow-through, I yell, "Fore!" as the ball sails left. I mumble to myself, "Glad this isn't my day job..."

Developer Dynamix has always used the Front Page Sports series to break into a sports market and become the standard bearer. With FPS: Golf, they're making a move into the golf scene, and they're sure to draw a Tiger Woods–like following.

First off, the players are rendered in 3D—with customizable shirts and pants—and exhibit realistic reactions before, during, and after the shot. Attempting to enhance the realistic feel, commentators' remarks on most shots are amusing the first few times, but they do tend to get repetitive.

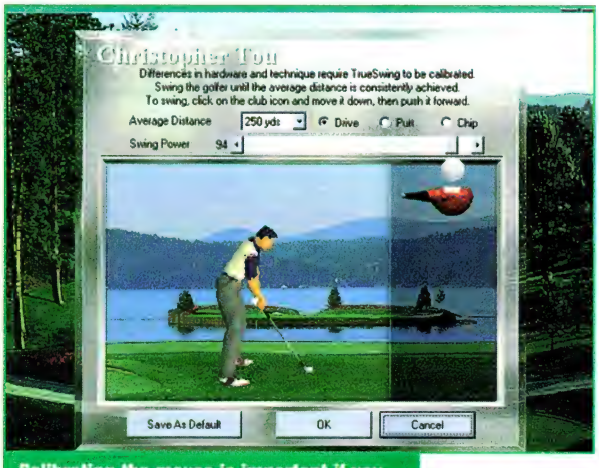
Course graphics are rendered in high resolution and are on par with those found in the best

Swing out!

3D-rendered sports titles. This isn't surprising, since the person who designed FPS: Golf also created Links 386. Objects like trees do start to pixelate heavily when you get close to them, but then again, that's all the more reason to stay on the fairway.

On the driving range, getting practice, practice, practice!

Hi-res graphics allow you to enjoy a sunny day in Hawaii, airfare included.



Calibrating the mouse is important if you want to master TrueSwing.

There are 12 different match types to play, including traditional medal and skins games (the latter have customizable purses) and matches using the Ryder Cup format or Stableford.

As other golf titles take the traditional three-click gameplay system to its limits, adding new graphic enhancements and ball physics to their core engines, FPS is among the first to cast off this control method. Give a warm welcome to TrueSwing. With this system, the club is controlled with mouse movement. The faster you pull the mouse back and push it forward, the harder you hit the ball. Vary your motion a little to the left or right, and you'll execute hooks and slices. TrueSwing is fully customizable, giving those on the hyper side the ability to turn down the default power, while allowing softies to ramp it up. Veteran gamers needn't worry—the old, tried-and-true tri-click method is still an option.

Getting used to TrueSwing does take awhile, never mind attaining precise control. Be prepared to spend a good deal of practice time on the driving range and putting greens: a slight variation in motion will make a shot that was supposed to hook left slice off to the right and end up in the drink.

The game comes with a converter, useful for importing the vast Links and Microsoft Golf course libraries. Of course, a veteran golf-gamer's course library could now be rendered obsolete. Sierra has already released two new courses of its own, with plans for more down the road.

Sadly, the multiplayer option seems unreliable. Many attempts to start up a LAN game resulted in frustration, and efforts to start Internet games also presented problems. FPS: Golf does support the Sierra Internet Gaming Service (SIGS), one that will doubtless grow over time. For now, though, there are few potential golf partners online, and those who are out there occasionally suffer problems such as games randomly booting people—more teething problems for online-gaming providers to solve.

Obviously, FPS: Golf isn't a straight-up hole-in-one. But it's certainly on the green and in with a chance at a birdie (in coming versions, no doubt).

FRONT PAGE SPORTS: GOLF

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	D+

With new TrueSwing, club control is all in the wrist.

PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707
WEB:	www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 16MB RAM, 20MB HD, 1MB graphics card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 32MB RAM, 45MB HD, SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS ▼ For drives of over 300 yards using TrueSwing, turn up the power-slider during calibration. ▼ Make sure to turn on grids during chipping *and* putting. And really study the shot from all available angles: It'll go a long way toward helping your short game. ▼ Go to the Windows menu and turn on the top view. It'll give you a better idea of where you are, where the hole is, and where your ball is going.

PGA Tour Pro

EA's Internet-friendly golf update

By Daniel Morris

A pitch from the beach allows for a good recovery. We may save this par yet.

This is not Tiger Woods. His license is unavailable, and that's why there is absolutely no Tiger Woods in this game.

Electronic Arts' sports division has occasionally been accused (mostly by developers of competing products) of resting on its laurels. In general, I've rarely agreed with these grumblings, but there's always been one EA sports line where such sentiments ring true for me: the PGA Tour series. From year to year, there's hasn't really been a sense of advancement: each new box seems to add only a frill or two to what is, admittedly, a superb product.

I won't be listening to those grumblings this time round, though. PGA Tour Pro is a smartly redesigned golf game, overhauled with online play in mind. The problem facing any new golf title these days is that there is so much darn competition. The challenge for developers has been to make their game a standout—different. And for PGA Tour Pro, the approach has been to make the game as simple and easy to play online as humanly possible.

Well, I can tell you that it really couldn't be much simpler. PGA Tour Pro's front end is remarkably handy. From the main screen, you're literally four mouse-clicks from an online tournament. And best of all, EA is hosting the games on its own server, meaning you play for free. It's as easy as clicking the EA Sports Net button, picking a match, chatting up your fellow duffers, and then hitting the links. In this regard, it's much like Blizzard's Battle.net or Sierra's server. It's a dream of convenience for people who, when they hear the term "Ping," think golf gear and not Internet technojargon.

The gameplay itself isn't all that different from earlier incarnations of PGA Tour. EA still hasn't abandoned the good-old three-click system, but it has added some nice features, such as a Risk Meter that warns you of overly ambitious shots. You can pick picture-in-picture camera angles such as the TV-style towercam, or the very cool ballcam, which chases the ball in flight.

Best of all, the screen refresh rate is astoundingly fast (at least on my P200), thanks to something called Flash Draw. Essentially, there is no time between redraws, making the transition between screens instant and seamless.

Visually, the game's been given a nice overhaul. The rippling water looks very good indeed (except when you're planting a drive into it). Trees and hedges, which have never been all that impressive in the PGA Tour series, now look lifelike. The graphics are far from photo-realistic and well behind the spectacle of Links LS or Jack Nicklaus 4, but there are some welcome touch-ups.

Best of all is the exclusive EA license for Pebble Beach. This course is a monster, full of blind tee shots and horrific doglegs. It's a beauty, but you may want to conquer Scottsdale and Bay Hill before you get yourself into trouble. Pro Tour is also compatible with previous PGA Tour courses Sawgrass, Spyglass Hill, Avenel, and Spanish Bay.

Some new play modes have been added for the multiplayer experience. You can now engage in stroke play, tournaments, skins games, and shoot-outs, all online or over a network. Fourteen video-captured pros—including Davis Love III, Lee Janzen, and Tom Kite—add a PGA presence to the competition. The game also supports microphone chat, which is an absolute joy.

PGA Tour Pro isn't quite in the league of some of the aforementioned games, and without a course designer, the only things to recommend it over Jack Nicklaus 4 are the free online play on EA Sports Net and the 14 pros. But for a painless, easy online golf experience at minimal cost, PGA Tour Pro is a solid advancement over PGA Tour 96.

Tom Kite rolls one home, fedora and all.

PGA TOUR PRO

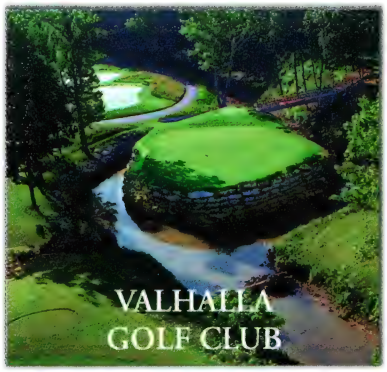
GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B+

B- OVERALL

It still can't compete with the big boys, but this latest Tour has some nifty updates—and easy online play.

DEVELOPER:	EA Sports
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525
WEB:	www.easports.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 12MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Carefully consult your Risk Meter for its advice on iffy shots. It errs on the side of caution, though, so if you think you can make it, take it. ▼ For pitches from the rough and sand, aim the ball to land just on the edge of the green. You'll be able to roll it to the cup, whereas aiming at the cup itself almost guarantees you'll roll right past. ▼ On tricky putts, cycle through the grid types to get a 3D cross-section relative to the ball's lie. Using several perspectives will give you a smart reading of the break.



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Arnold Palmer at Oakland Hills, Hole 7

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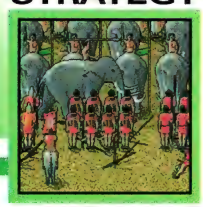

The Great Battles Of Alexander

By Barry Brenesal

The closest of three camera views on Alexander's battlefields reveals agreeable, non-animated images.

In 336 B.C., in an attempt to suppress the revolt of the Danubian tribes, Alexander confronts the rebel army near the Lyginus river.
OK
Cancel
Help

He was the greatest military conqueror of his time, suffering no major defeat before his death due to illness at the age of 33. Now, The Great Battles of Alexander offers an opportunity to follow in his strategic footsteps, playing out 10 of Alexander's greatest challenges. Can you forge a military empire, or will Darius' mighty Persians send you scurrying back to the relative safety of Doom clones? Only time and strategic excellence will tell.

The battles chosen for Alexander's historical campaign through Asia range from short 10-rounders like Arigaeum to a clash at Gaugamela that could easily last two to three nights and through several bags of pretzels. The Campaign Mode, however, amounts to little more than window dressing: it merely allows you to play the same scenarios in a "geographical order" (moving your troops from one battlefield to the next). At the end, you get a rating.

A hardcore wargamer's delight

The game's producers researched the strengths and weaknesses of these Bronze Age troop types very thoroughly, and their implementation is first-rate. Just ignore the accompanying "historical video" if you're looking for strategic hints: the visuals are awful, and the content is slim, pretentious, and unreliable.

Alexander's battlefield AI is superb. Whichever side you play, your computer-driven opponent makes a shrewd foe who evaluates the conflict with precision. The interface is also good, supplying a reasonable choice of buttons (Center On Leader, Hex Grid On/Off, Reverse View) with pop-up labels. Single-clicking a unit selects it, while double-clicking supplies more detailed information about its status. In short, no surprises here.

Instead, they lie in Alexander's galloping resource and memory consumption. Loading the biggest battles in this game requires 16MB of RAM with 80MB of hard-drive swap space, or—get this—32MB of RAM if you only have 65MB of hard-drive swap space. The game notes suggest turning off animation to ameliorate this, but the animation is very slight anyway (nothing but little banners waving in a breeze, and only for the small number of units under the currently active commander). The animation's even worse when it depicts close conflict; the poor art and low frame count give the artistically rendered clips a jerky, jarring, 2D feel.

Many typical mood-enhancing wargame frills are noticeably absent. For instance, the music's pleasant enough, but why couldn't we have had some voices acknowledging our commands? And it would have added to the exotic reality of the subject matter if, after double-clicking on a unit, you received a close-up image of it in full battle regalia on a portion of your screen.

Some wargames also incorporate an editor that lets you fine-tune unit types, devise entirely new armies, and create maps. Not this one: Alexander permits alterations to its simple win/loss and rout conditions, but that's it—a limitation forced by its historical-accuracy plan, perhaps.

Multiplayer options are limited to two-player games with the usual modem and serial support. There's also Internet play, though I-Magic currently has no plans to support any server base for people to play together.

In short, The Great Battles of Alexander has serviceable graphics, great AI, and a set of 10 intriguing strategic challenges for the armchair commander. But it seems light on options, imagination, and mood. This one's for diehard wargamers only.

The basic battle screen: uncluttered and ready for your commands.

THE GREAT BATTLES OF ALEXANDER

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	C
MULTIPLAYER:	B

B- OVERALL

Excellent AI and interface, but the lack of configurable options and visual imagination limits its appeal.

DEVELOPER:	GSE Erudite Software
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/100, 16MB RAM, 80MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Avoid placing cavalry next to elephants. Horses panic, causing loss of unit cohesiveness. ▼ Don't throw your skirmishers boldly forward: they'll get eaten alive. Think of them as sniper groups, and send them scurrying around the wings of your opponent's army. ▼ Unlike in many wargames, you can't move all your units in each turn—only a given number that depends on each commander's initiative rating. Choose the units you move wisely. ▼ Conversely, if your leader has initiative left over after allocating movement, use the remainder to remove cohesion points (actually morale hits) or to rally units. ▼ Use terrain to your advantage: fight downhill wherever possible, and if you're downhill, wait for the enemy to come to you. ▼ Create an overall plan of action before battle. Avoid one-on-one melees, since most of Alexander's enemies had numerical superiority. ▼ Leave clear passages for routed friendly units. Routed units that are forced to move through your other troops will cause morale loss.

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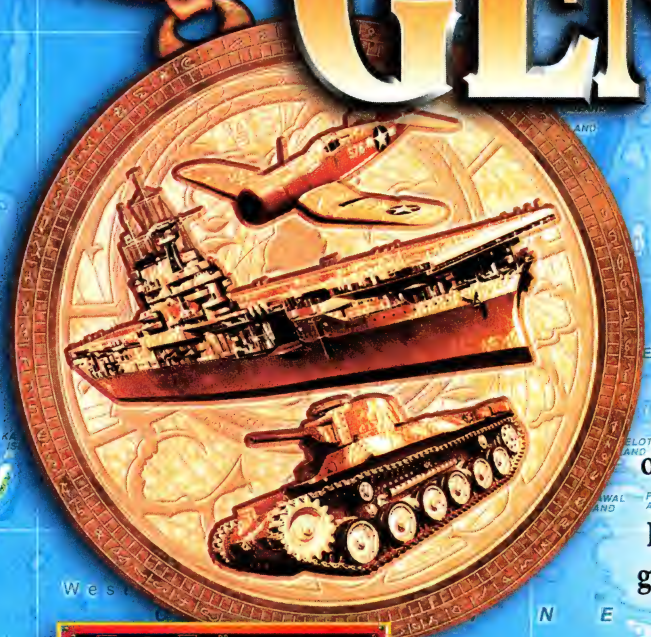

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HOMM II: The Price of Loyalty

Expand the fantasy

PC GAMES A LIST

A great act deserves an encore, and that's exactly what Heroes of Might and Magic II: The Price of Loyalty is. As an expansion pack that requires HOMM II, it stirs a few more interesting elements into the mix.

The second Heroes was an excellent turn-based strategy game set in a colorful fantasy universe. Above all, it was the combination of playability, enormous visual charm, and a number of possible approaches to empire-building that made this game a winner.

Much the same can be said of The Price of Loyalty. It sprinkles more than a dozen new artifacts throughout the game, some with mixed benefits (like the Broach of Shielding, which grants 1/2 damage from combat spells but lowers the bearer's power by 2). There are recruitment sites for elementals and ghosts, and magical barriers that require passwords for entry. You'll also find jailed heroes and Alchemists' Towers that can destroy cursed artifacts.

However, the core of The Price of Loyalty is its 30 new stand-alone scenarios and four new campaigns. The two shorter campaigns, The Wizard's Isle and The Voyage Home, each include four scenarios, with one plot fork where you get to choose between two of the scenarios. The other campaigns, Descendants and The Price of Loyalty, employ eight scenarios and two plot forks each. Expect tough but fair challenges that provide numerous paths to victory and the ignominy of defeat.

The one area in which The Price of Loyalty doesn't improve on the original is the music. Check out the Barbarian castle with its pensive little woodwind tune for a typical mismatch between sound and image.

That aside, this expansion set is very welcome. Heroes of Might and Magic II: The Price of Loyalty demonstrates that "more of the same" isn't necessarily a bad thing. *—Barry Brenesal*

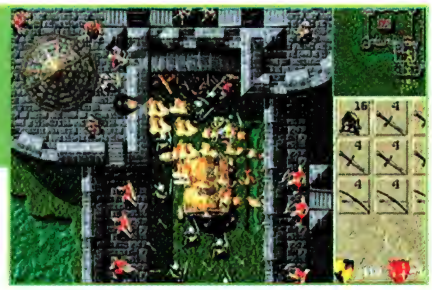
THE PRICE OF LOYALTY

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

More scenarios and new elements make a great game even better.

DEVELOPER:	New World Computing
PUBLISHER:	Studio 3DO 800-336-3506
WEB:	www.nwcomputing.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 5MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive, HOMM II
RECOMMENDED:	P90
STREET PRICE:	$30

Lords of the Realm II Siege Pack



Siege defenders are outnumbered, but they have every other advantage in the fight.

PC GAMES A LIST

Lords of the Realm II still gets a regular workout on PCs around the office, basking in its lofty position as the single best combination of real-time action and immersive strategy simulation. So imagine our delight upon receiving the expansion Siege Pack.

Basically, it's a must-have for fans of LOTR, offering around 40 new battle scenarios in three categories: equal battle, unequal battle, and siege. Equal battles are straight-up matches between even armies, where the crucial factors are the terrain and how you maneuver your forces to best take advantage of it. Examples are Isthmus, where narrow strips of land wind across a big lake, forcing fighting to the sides and bringing lake-crossing archers to the forefront; and Guerrilla War, where combat takes place in a claustrophobic tangle of woods, demanding a pure melee focus.

We pour boiling oil in your general direction

Unequal battles pit one numerically superior force against another, but give the smaller army the advantage of defensive preparation and fortification. These are perfect challenges for both players. The best of this lot is Baffled, where the attacker has to survive a treacherous maze to reach the thinly spread defenders on the other side.

The best batch of scenarios is the Siege set, where one side defends a castle from an invader. These span a variety of fortifications, ranging from the Palisade, a rudimentary prehistoric defense, to the foreboding Leeds Castle, where oil vats guard the way to an isolated island tower.

This add-on also includes a map editor, which is like manna for devotees of LOTR's intense battle mode. Now you can build your own environments—laying terrain, water bodies, and structures. There's also a new strategic campaign in Australia, adding another continent to the madcap collection of campaigns in the original LOTR. But the real fun lies in the skirmishes. All told, there are enough goodies here to keep Lords fans buzzing at their mousepads for months. *—Daniel Morris*

LOTR II SIEGE PACK

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A

A standout expansion disc for a standout action-strategy game.

DEVELOPER:	Impressions
PUBLISHER:	Sierra On-Line 800-757-7707
WEB:	www.sierra.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 8MB RAM, 33MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive, LOTR II
RECOMMENDED:	16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$30

Ardennes Offensive

By Daniel Morris

Every World War II buff knows McAuliffe's famous retort to the German surrender order at Bastogne. The Nazis had the town encircled, and the Americans seemed to have no hope of survival, but McAuliffe's notorious gesture of defiance—the somewhat edited version being a radio communication of "Nuts!"—made history.

Back to basics

That kind of defiant stand is the sort that SSI is making with the release of Ardennes Offensive. In the age of the cotton-candy wargame, where real-time action and top-dollar graphics are de rigeur, a game like Ardennes Offensive seems almost predestined for oblivion. That's a shame, because it could teach people a thing or two about strategic simulation.

This is old school in the best possible sense of the phrase. Strategic Studies Group of Pensacola, Florida, spent two and a half years crafting the AI to give players a worthy computer adversary—and to handle many of the micromanagerial hassles that can make detailed games less fun. You're free to worry about the big problems—the strategic elements of movement and attack—without being weighed down by less pressing matters. Supply, weather, zones of control, and the like factor heavily into the game and its outcome, but you're never bogged down in these details. They appear quite naturally and unobtrusively in the gameplay.

Gameplay is surprisingly simple, and I attained confidence with the command features after running through the half-hour tutorial Bastogne scenario. From there I was able to tackle the full-fledged, 60-turn grand campaign with no trip-ups. Allocating artillery support, assigning spec-ops missions, ordering bridge repairs—it's all remarkably intuitive and handled without too much manual-diving.

The "Bulge" forms as Panzers streak out from behind German defenses.

That said, Ardennes Offensive isn't a game for everybody. Its graphics are primitive and its map unexciting. Its combat sound effects are rudimentary, though the music is very effective—a haunting piano score that lends all kinds of atmosphere to what is already a chilling campaign to re-create. Actual fighting is limited to a crossed-swords icon and some sound effects, with a die roll and outcome. Not exactly a spine-breaking delivery. And multiplay is limited to hotseat and email. Not surprisingly, these are faults that many classic computer wargames suffer from as well.

The emphasis, as in all of the best turn-based wargames, is on the experience that goes on between the ears, not between the monitor and your eyes. The game is played in your head, in the tactical acrobatics of decision-making and appraisal and reappraisal of the evolving battlefield.

You're not going to let these guys conquer the world, are you?

Ardennes Offensive brought me back to those grand, contemplative board games that used to so involve me before wargaming was something I did on a computer. For 30 minutes I stared at an unmoving screen, chewing over each hex of terrain in my mind, and in a flash of reflection I realized that the half-hour I'd just spent contemplating my next turn was the most immersed I'd been in any computer game in quite awhile.

My fear, needless to say, is that the audience for this product has been diluted into nothingness by the sheer weight of the lobotomized strategy games that have dominated the market for so long. Games like Ardennes Offensive just aren't *played* much anymore, and it will be interesting to see what befalls this game on the shelves.

Ian Trout and Roger Keating of SSG deserve praise for the care and craft evident in this classic, counter-based wargame. SSG is set to deliver more games in the Decisive Battles of World War II series, tentatively scheduled for annual release. The next is a simulation of the Koursin Pocket battle. I await it eagerly.

Combat is actually more exciting than this dry screen would indicate.

ARDENNES OFFENSIVE

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B

Low-tech, high-intensity wargaming in the trusty old tradition.

DEVELOPER:	Strategic Studies Group
PUBLISHER:	Strategic Simulations Inc. 800-601-7529
WEB:	www.ssionline.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 8MB RAM, 19MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	12MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

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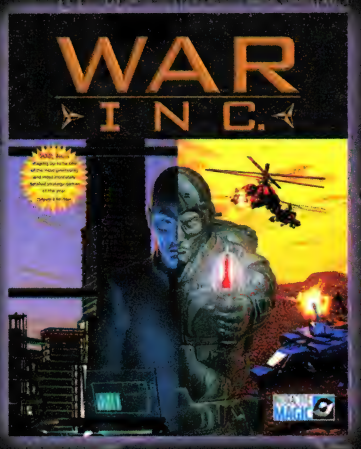

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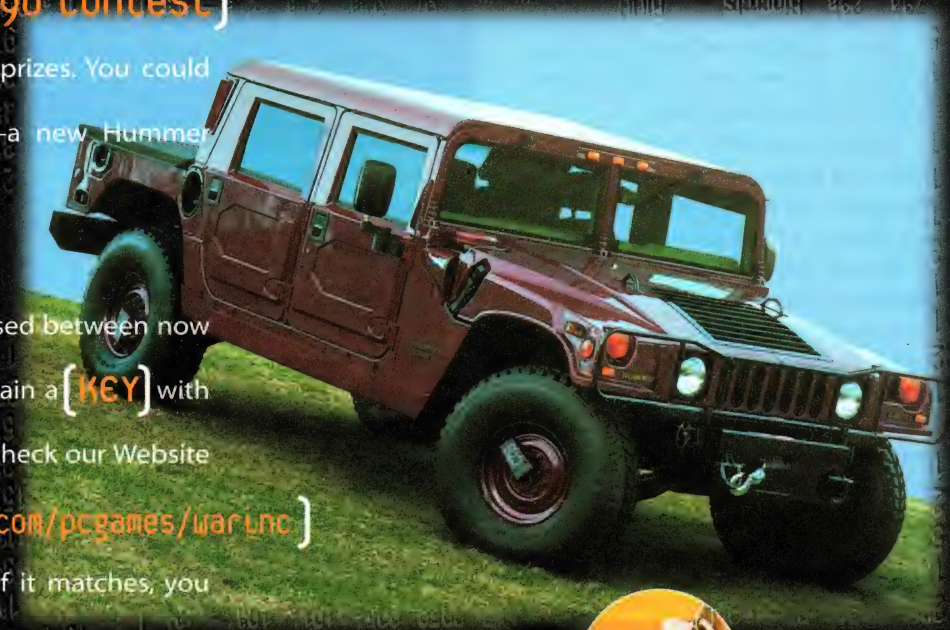

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Warlords III: Reign of Heroes

The fine art of elf-killing

By Barry Brenesal

Warlords III is hardcore, turn-based wargaming set in a fantasy universe. You pick one of eight races (Orcs, Giants, Undead, etc.), and play against up to seven opponents in a land where combat and exploration tip the balance between becoming world ruler or museum relic. Adding to the fun is Warlords' configurability. You can customize nearly everything, from the number of islands on a randomly generated map to the number of units permitted in each player's army stacks to the unit types, win conditions, and appearance of each player's ceremonial shield.

There's no question that Warlords' combat AI is among the best in the business. It never cheats, and at top setting is fully a match for any humanoid armchair general. Not so Warlords' diplomatic AI, however. It's improved since the last release—computer opponents calculate factions into their rating of other players (you're a friend of my enemy, therefore I like you less). But alliances mean nothing; and your computerized adversaries never seem to understand the wisdom of monetary gifts or truce proposals when in desperate straits, though these game options are available. It just can't touch the diplomatic AI of games like SegaSoft's Emperor of the Fading Suns and MicroProse's Civilization II.

Warlords' new hi-res, 256-color graphics create stronger atmosphere to match its already great AI.

A new interface keeps much that was good before, including lots of configurable hotkeys, an excellent online tutorial, and a sensible selection of buttons that subsume grouped game activities. If you want information depth, it's here—you can even review each player's funding situation on a past turn-by-turn basis. On the other hand, you can't bring up the related displays for both army units currently in production and vectoring (shipping produced units directly between cities) at the same time. The Hero Location button lets you cycle through your heroes on a thumbnail map, but you can't zoom to a hero by double-clicking.

From time to time, heroes will offer to join you, bringing different professional abilities that enhance your troops.

Stylish, colorful reports enable you to quickly track gold, mana, production, and status.

Magical spells still feel undernourished (they were added in Warlords II), since some of the game's army units already provide the same effects you'll discover in the strongest offensive magic. But the strikingly improved visuals and music add strongly to this latest release's fantasy atmosphere. The game's few tunes are both catchy and well-realized, and the top-down, hand-drawn SVGA animated figures and landscape are excellent. The noninteractive video sequences are kept mercifully short and focus mainly on Lord Bain, the villain of the single, lengthy, enclosed campaign.

This campaign consists of 10 linked, well-designed scenarios that carry across some of your best units as you progress toward victory—or defeat. There are also 12 standalone scenarios that can be played from any of the sides involved (up to eight on the larger ones). You can generate and save your own maps, but you can't place castles, sites, and descriptions. (These may be included in a future Scenario Builder.) Multiplayer options allow you to combat up to six human opponents simultaneously via a local-area network, null-modem connection, hot-seat mode, or through Red Orb Zone's dedicated Internet link.

Despite the caveats expressed above, Warlords III is a major strategy/fantasy release. The combat AI, configurability, and graphics are great; the music, vectoring, and diplomacy have been improved; and the multiplayer options add a new dimension to the product. Wargamers, set aside your tanks and fighters for a bit, flag down the nearest unicorn, and check out Warlords III. It's worth the cabfare.

WARLORDS III: REIGN OF HEROES

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Some strong features in this turn-based strategy wargame with a fantasy twist.

DEVELOPER:	Strategic Studies Group
PUBLISHER:	Red Orb 800-548-1798
WEB:	www.warlords3.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 40MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P100
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ If you're offered an increase to leadership ability when your hero makes a level, grab it. Leadership adds to the attack bonus of all armies in the hero's stack. ▼ Save before searching a ruin. Your hero could be killed, and the rewards might differ considerably every time you are victorious. ▼ Try to avoid sending powerful armies exploring the terrain; it makes the other inhabitants nervous. Send weak, fast fliers instead. ▼ Learn the advantages and disadvantages of your particular race. Dwarven units are cheap but slow and not very powerful. Elven units receive bonuses in forests. ▼ Avoid expanding your empire in several directions at once. You'll find yourself simultaneously at war with several opponents, which can lead to a quick, grisly ending. ▼ Look for useful sites that increase the value of units produced within a nearby castle—then grab that castle! Extra hit points, strength, or movement bonuses can make a big difference as you start churning out large armies.

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Formula 1

Sure, you'll need extra hardware to run it, but the crisp, clear graphics of Formula 1 rival anything in the arcade.

As a 3D acceleration–only game, you'd expect Formula 1 to be visually impressive—*really* impressive. Psygnosis has taken the adamant position that the only way to allow PC games to compete with consoles is by making additional video hardware a requirement. And sure enough, Formula 1 certainly doesn't disappoint in the looks department.

Whoa! Is this a coin-op?

This arcade-style Formula 1 racing title is heavy on the instant-gratification factor inherent in coin-ops and very, very light on anything that might be considered sim-like. Formula 1 on the PlayStation was a top-notch, extremely fast racer, but it looks primitive compared to the 3Dfx Voodoo-powered PC version. Oddly, the PC version feels a notch slower on the whole.

Otherwise, it's a straight-over conversion. The game uses the 1995 Formula 1 season stats, including all 13 two-driver teams and a commendable 17 circuits. There are two game modes: an arcade mode and the more advanced Grand Prix mode, which is supported by very limited customization options (limited car setup, weather, race length, and so on). There are also options for helping you brake and steer if the car seems too unwieldy.

Formula 1 has excellent sound options and effects with stereo, using Qsound and Dolby Pro-Logic modes. Erstwhile UK F1 commentator Murray Walker's overly exuberant voice will likely grate on your nerves after awhile, whereupon you'll switch over to the game's hard-rocking soundtrack (you can't have both on at once).

A shocking omission is the total lack of multiplayer support: no PC conversion of this type can really be considered complete without multiplayer options. Even the PlayStation version supported the link cable. The game also lacks built-in steering-wheel support, which is a seriously unfortunate oversight.

Admittedly, these are big gaps, and they keep this game from approaching racing hits like Power F1. But as it is, Formula 1 looks and sounds great, and offers fast, fun, arcade-style playability.

—Jason D'Aprile

FORMULA 1

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Great features, but lacking in some key areas.

PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794
WEB:	www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P100,16MB RAM, 50MB HD, 3D accelerator card, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166
STREET PRICE:	$54

NHL Powerplay '98

Sophomore slump

I was very impressed a year ago with Virgin's NHL Powerplay '96, scoring it only a scant notch below EA's NHL 97 and actually giving it the nod in terms of AI and realistic gameplay. I called Powerplay a blue-chip prospect and eagerly awaited the next installment.

So Powerplay '98 has arrived (Virgin skipped straight over '97), repackaged with a new 3D engine that was supposed to elevate the game far above the mark it reached in its 2D, sprite-based debut. It should have been the recipe for a potential EA-killer.

Fighting is allowed, but Powerplay '98 needs more work before it can duke it out with EA's NHL series.

Unfortunately, it's a bit of a disappointment. Sure, the game can be played in 3D now (as well as in the '96 version's 2D mode, which hasn't been enhanced any, qualitywise), but the graphics aren't in EA's league. Player animations are not as smooth or convincing, and the quality of art in general (boards, nets, sticks) is not up to NHL 97's caliber. The puck physics, however, are excellent.

Not so excellent is the fact that there are still no network- or Internet-play options. While this game can be a lot of fun head-to-head on a single system, this protracted oversight is discouraging.

The great thing about Powerplay '96 was that it played like genuine hockey, with good coaching options and computer AI that actually made scoring a challenge. I found scoring to be much easier in this new version—computer opponents can almost always be evaded on open ice. And yet, the opposite is also true: unless you're controlling your own defensemen, you'll find yourself facing breakaway after breakaway on your own goalie.

There's still hope for this series. Radical needs to forget about challenging EA on the graphics battleground and work instead on crafting the market's most realistic and involving hockey game—a title they claimed a year ago. Let's hope we can chalk this one up to sophomore slump.

—Daniel Morris

NHL POWERPLAY '98

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	C

The 3D update of Virgin's fine hockey game does little to gain ground on EA.

DEVELOPER:	Radical Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Virgin Interactive Entertainment 800-874-4607
WEB:	www.vie.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 49MB HD, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$50

Win 95 is *cool*, but *sucks* with DOS games!

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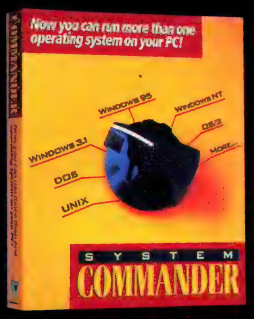

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Pro Pinball: Timeshock!

PC GAMES A LIST

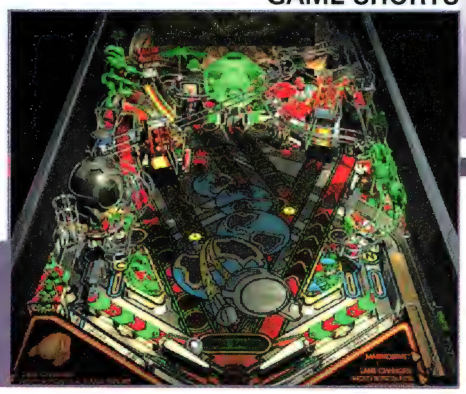
Pinball is just a game? Not when it comes to the Pro Pinball series' second outing, Timeshock! The first of this series, Pro Pinball: The Web, was released amid a glut of second-rate pinball games. It was more than your basic PC pinball; it was a pinball *simulation*, with detail and physics so real that you forgot all about the limitations of the single table.

Now, with Pro Pinball: Timeshock!, the designers have augmented an already excellent game by incorporating a storyline, lending reason to the ball-bashing. The past, present, and future are at stake as you rush to collect the fragments of a shattered Time Crystal. You travel through four ages and various continents (including a secret area or two) by hitting ingenious combinations of the superbly structured ramps and orbits.

Stellar silverball

Okay, so it's pinball, but Timeshock! takes it to another level by paying incredible attention to the details, finesse, and nuances that make it such a challenging pastime. The spinner spins at the right velocity, the ball behaves with real-world physics, and the wires that'd be visible on a real version of this table are visible onscreen.

On top of this, it's all customizable. An in-depth table structure lets you tweak features such as the number of balls and the appearance frequency of special options. In addition, the sim tracks every feature you highlight and works out percentages for such things as your completion rate of special events, length of games, and the average duration of each ball, to name just a few.



A digital display supplies info on special features you need to hit.

And it all looks amazing. While you'll need some overboard ninja PC to play smoothly in 1600-by-1200 resolution in 16 million colors, it still looks tremendous in the lowest view of 640-by-480, 256 colors. Backed by four great tunes (which hardcore pinballers will turn off, because tracks changing on the CD pause gameplay) and the familiar buzzers, bells, and voice instructions, this is as near to pinball perfection as we've seen on the PC.

—Rob Smith

PRO PINBALL: TIMESHOCK!

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS :	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	C

The finest pinball sim anywhere.

PUBLISHER:	Empire Interactive 800-216-9706
WEB:	www.empire-us.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 8MB RAM, 10MB HD, 1MB PCI graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 140MB HD, 8MB PCI graphics
STREET PRICE:	$30

Capitalism Plus

Don't expect much flash from Capitalism Plus' screens. You won't see farmers threshing wheat, but you will reap the dividends in this heavy-duty business sim.

If intensive macrosimulation of corporate development through product sales sounds like something you want to spend leisure time on, Capitalism is the place to look. This newly released Plus version is more of an extension set than a major upgrade, except it can be run without reference to the older product.

Ruling through the dollar sign

Like most sims, Plus supplies a playing field wide-open for development. You start by choosing a firm (department store, farm, research and development center, mine, oil well, or logging camp) and an appropriate location for your base of operations. Each firm type has different associated costs, unit types, production schemes, and markets.

You can sell your products to stores or businesses, or even open another firm (perhaps a department store) to sell your own products. Will you sell to the competition as well? Boost product sales and improve quality through extra research? Search and pay for better supplies? Launch an advertising campaign to enhance brand recognition?

These are only a few of the issues that confront you at every turn as a CEO. There's lots of detail that can only be hinted at here, and the charts, reports, excellent documentation, and great series of in-game tutorials and guides lower the steep learning curve significantly.

Veteran Capitalism CEOs will be pleased that the update includes map and scenario editors, letting you design your own worlds and reconfigure industries from the ground up. You can also add real-world maps. More than 80 new products have been added, as well as random events (fires, crop diseases, etc.) and a host of situational scenarios to challenge your entrepreneurial skills.

Despite claims of improved SVGA graphics, this new version still lacks visual imagination. Too many images are non-animated and unchanging, such as the icons that represent your various businesses.

That aside, if you want a complex business sim with great AI, lots of options, dynamic real-world modeling, and excellent help, look no further. Capitalism Plus awaits, with endless challenges to any modern Adam Smith–on-the-make.

—Barry Brenesal

CAPITALISM PLUS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

The original business sim gets a map editor and some challenging new scenarios.

DEVELOPER:	Enlight Software
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
RECOMMENDED:	sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

It's all about variety, fellow cheaters—and this month, we've got more than ever. MDK, Shadow Warrior, Independence Day...the action's right here. Arcade fans, dig these mutant cheats for the X-Men game. Angry drivers will get plenty of help with Moto Racer and Sega Rally, and strategists get some elixir for Dungeon Keeper and Theme Hospital. We've even got help for adventurers taking the Last Express. This is your ride: hop aboard!

MDK

If you've got the unpatched US version, try these bad boys during gameplay:

biggrenade: homing sniper grenade power-up.

decoykurt: decoy power-up.

makemefull: 100 percent health.

masterblaster: super chaingun power-up.

twistandshout: twister power-up.

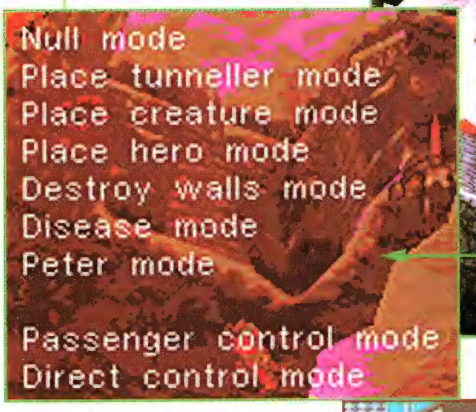
486willbeslow: lets game run on 486s.

Note: Each code can be used only once per level. See **www.pcgames.com** for codes to the patched/European versions.

SEE MORE ONLINE
http://www.pcgames.com

Dungeon Keeper

Now here's an easy one: During gameplay, hit the Enter key on the number pad to bring up a cheat menu.



Theme Hospital

Type these codes or punch them into the phone on the fax-machine screen; then press the green button.

7287: After you win the level, you'll go to a rat-shoot level.

24328: Enables in-game cheats. After typing in this code, you can use the following cheats:

Shift-C: gain $10,000.

Ctrl-C: all research completed.

Ctrl-M: go to end of the month.

Ctrl-Y: go to end of the year.

F11: lose game.

F12: win game.

Level skip: Run Theme Hospital with an **-Lx** command-line parameter, where "x" is the level you wish to warp to.

QUICK BITS

Capitalism Plus
During the game, type **$$$***$$$** to gain $100,000,000.

Meat Puppet
During the game, type **~dansmartbomb** to kill everything on the screen.

Need for Speed II
To drive any course at night: After selecting RACE, when the track-loading screen with the status bar comes up, hold down **n** until you're in the race. (For a full list of NFS II cheats, see our July/August issue, or visit **www.pcgames.com**.)

Shadow Warrior shareware

*To blast your way through the demo on this month's PC Games.exe, simply hit **T** during a game, and, while in talk mode, type one of these codes. (Check out the bunny rockets!)*

swchan: god mode.

swgimme: all items.

swghost: no clip mode.

swgreed: all cheats on.

swtrekx (where x = 01, 02, 03, 04): level warp.

swloc: show location in upper left-hand corner.

swmap: toggle automapping.

swres: change screen resolution.

swstart: go to the start.

swtrix: enable bunny rockets.

winpachinko: always win the Pachinko games.

config: displays "Help Config."

quit: quits game.

Moto Racer

When the game asks you to enter a name, type one of the following (the game will beep and ask for your name again, at which point you can type anything you want):

cdnalsi: makes all tracks available.

ctekcop: lets you use miniature bikes for practice and single-race.

cesrever: reverses all the courses.

Last Express

To skip through a fighting sequence:

(1) When a fight starts, click the right mouse button to abort the fight and return to the clock screen.

(2) Click on the clock to resume the fight.

(3) Repeat steps (1) and (2) five times. After the fifth time, you'll proceed as if you've won the fight.

Independence Day

To access the cheat menu:

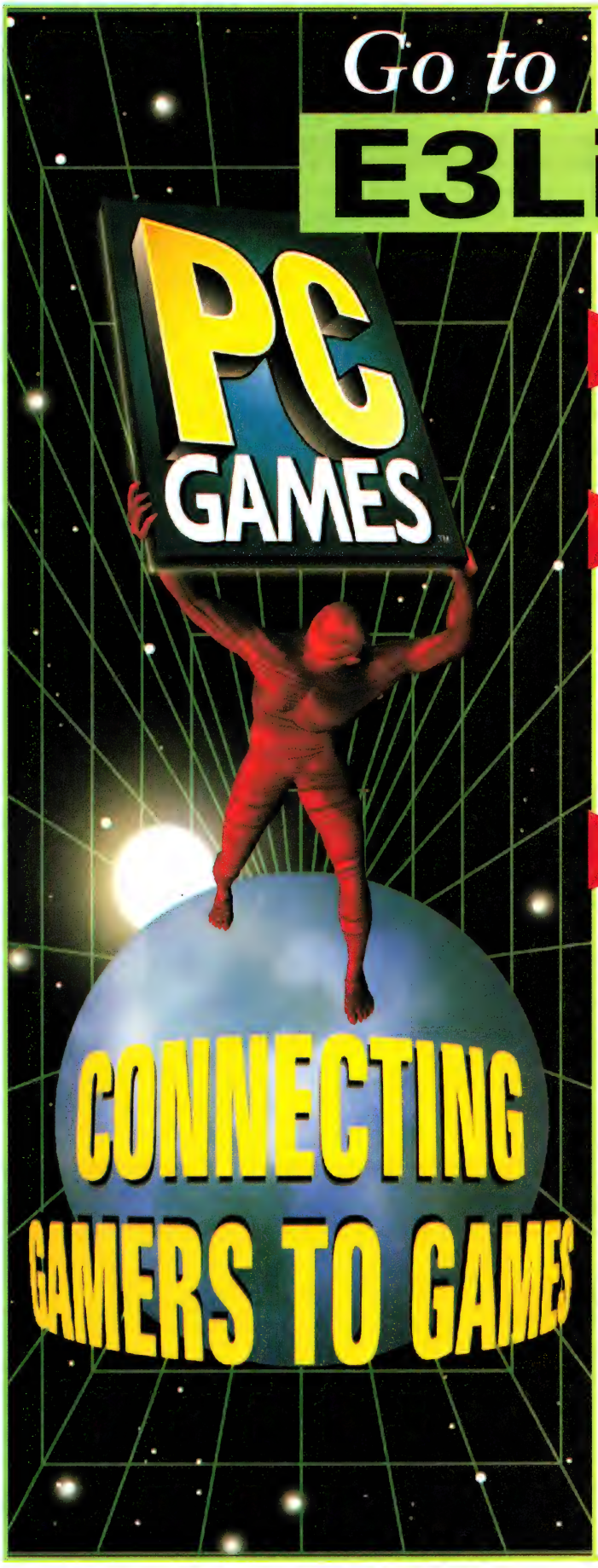
(1) In the game's main menu, pick Options.

(2) Pick Player Name.

(3) Type **RADARMY** and pick End.

(4) Pick Exit from Options menu to return to the main menu.

(5) Press **Ctrl** + **Right Shift** + **8**, and you'll go straight to the cheat menu.



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Sega Rally Championship

To enable the cheats, enter the name SEX at the name-entry screen. You can now do the following:

Lake Side Track:
Press **X** + **Y** (on the keyboard) on the main menu. The Lake Side Track can be selected on Practice, Time Attack, and Two-Player mode. It will appear on the Records screen, and the music can be selected on the Sound Option screen. (This cheat has to be entered only once.)

Stratos Car:
On the main menu press **X**, **Y**, **Z**, **Y**, **X** (on the keyboard). To select the Stratos car in Arcade mode, press the right cursor key when the cursor is on Delta MT (in Car Select) to get the Stratos MT, and the left cursor key when cursor is on Celica AT to get the Stratos AT. The Stratos car appears on the Records screen. (This cheat has to be entered only once.)

(MT = Manual; AT = Automatic)

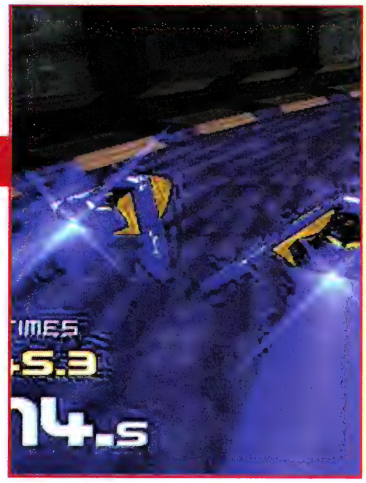
High-Powered Car:
Hold **X** + **C** (keyboard) and press **Enter** to choose your car on the Car Select screen. New Records will appear for Hyper Cars.

Opponent races with Stratos:
Choose Practice mode, hold down **Z** + **C**, and press **Enter** to choose course. Keep holding down **Z** + **C** until the game starts. (Stratos car must be enabled.)

Mirror Mode:
Arcade: On Select Game screen hold **Y** + **C** and press **Enter** to select Championship/Practice. Time Attack/2P: On Course Select screen hold **Y** + **C** and press **Enter** to select course. (Time record and ghost data will not be recorded. No ghost will be available.)

Ending Camera Zoom:
When replay is being shown, press accelerate/brake button or numpad **4** to toggle views; select Up/Down to zoom in/out. Switch to chase-car perspective and press left, right, up, or down to get different car perspectives; use Change View button to get the original chase-car view.

WipeOut XL



Type the following codes at the places noted:

On the copywrite load-up screen:

rush: gives you silly ships.

Anywhere in menus:

xteam: gives you a piranha ship.

xclass: gives you phantom class.

xtrack: track cheat.

Anywhere in game:

psyrapid: mini-gun.

psyprotect: infinite energy shield.

psymega: infinite weapons.

psyticker: infinite time.

Darklight Conflict

During gameplay, hit the **Tab** and **Page Up** keys simultaneously, then hit **P**. At the bottom of the screen, you should see the words Cheat Enabled. You are now invincible.

X-Men: Children of the Atom

To bring up the game's cheat menu, do the following at the main menu:

(1) Highlight Spiral for four seconds.

(2) Move the cursor to the Iceman.

(3) Move one character to the right.

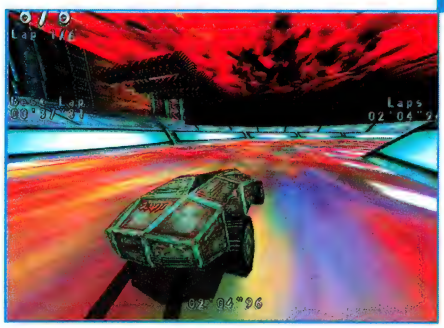
(4) Move one character up.

(5) Move two characters to the right (Omega Red).

(6) Move down to Silver Samurai.

(7) Wait four seconds, then press Low Kick, Fierce Kick, and Fierce Punch at the same time.

POD



Enter these codes during gameplay:

map: shows the track map in place of the tacometer.

F9 (after typing **map**): shows enhanced map, with cars as numbers 1 to 8.

label: shows players' names above their cars.

retro: rearview mirror.

Type **mirror** at the main menu to enable a REVERSE button on the track-selection menu.

Build It Yourself

Don't be scared by computer guts: you can build your own PC

By George T. Chronis

So you laugh heartily at those poor souls who fear opening up their computer cases to add new memory or change a motherboard? You say you're bold enough to tackle building a Pentium MMX game system from scratch rather than buying one of those "anemic also-rans" from the likes of Toshiba, Dell, Sony, Compaq, and Micron? To prove that anyone can build a top-of-the-line game machine, *PC Games* took up the challenge and built an alternative to the three commercially available MMX PCs reviewed in last month's issue ("MMX Nirvana," July/August 1997, page 203).

These days, a 3D accelerator is a must.
Creative's AWE64 is a great place to start for game audio.
Fast CD-ROM drives like this Toshiba 12x are inexpensive.

The Guts

Although Intel doesn't sell directly to consumers, it does manufacture OEM motherboards and sell them to computer-makers, including local garage shops. Thus, while you may find an Intel motherboard —like the TC430HX we obtained —for sale at a local retailer who also builds systems to order, it will not come with Intel customer support, and any problems you have with it must be handled by the retailer.

As for the heart of the system, we went with an Intel 200MHz MMX Pentium CPU. Like you, we hope 1998 games won't make P200s obsolete, and having MMX makes sense, given the number of games that are making use of the new graphics technology. For now, 32MB of RAM is a prudent amount. The TC430HX already has 256K of L2 cache and I/O controllers built in, so we didn't have to worry about serial and parallel ports.

Sound and Vision

The TC430HX comes with a humble Yamaha OPL3 sound processor and game port built in, but we decided to upgrade to Creative's Sound Blaster AWE64 sound card.

To get the fastest 2D graphics possible, *PC Games* got one of Diamond's new 4MB Stealth 3D 2000 Pro video accelerators. From what we've seen, the Pro is around two times as fast at 2D rendering as the original, earning it an A rating. Either way, we can highly recommend both cards for soldiering through your day-to-day video needs. As for 3D acceleration, it's no secret that 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset has captured our fancy. To keep things all in the family, we went with Diamond's Monster 3D accelerator, and both work flawlessly together.

Storage

Given the number of games we review and the amount of installation space they take up, having a large-capacity hard disk is a very attractive option. So we chose Maxtor's Model 85120A 5.1GB IDE drive for our system. With 10ms seek times, this hard drive isn't hampered by its massive capacity. Overall, the Maxtor's performance is as competitive as its $475 street price.

Our choice for a CD-ROM drive was Toshiba's recently released 12x IDE unit, reviewed in last month's issue (July/August 1997, page 208). This drive can be found easily throughout the United States and delivers random-access times of 125ms and a sustained data transfer rate of 1.8MB per second. The only used component in the system was a Teac 1.44MB–1.2MB combination disk drive that we were able to salvage from an old 486 in the office.

Finish Line

So how did *PC Games*' DIY P200 stack up against the commercial systems reviewed last month? Quite well, all told. The Intel motherboard was not tweaked for performance, yet in our benchmark tests, it was but 11 notches

continued on page 165

HOW FAST IS IT?

Processor Score:	129
Video Score:	233
Hard Drive Score:	130

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

Courier I-Modem

RATING: B+

The I-Modem is as fast as you can get at home.

So that little cyberdemon is on your shoulder again, suggesting that your 33.6 modem is too slow to play Hexen II online. Sure, you could consider a 56K modem, but 56K only works for downloads. So the little red fella suggests ISDN, which can pump 64K or 128K of data per second. But ISDN access lines aren't plentiful enough yet. Then he whispers that if you buy U.S. Robotics' new Courier I-Modem, you can have both options.

Combining an x2-capable modem (the U.S. Robotics 56K standard) and ISDN hardware in a single unit, I-Modem gives you the best of both worlds for $370. Other ISDN products require a separate modem to connect to modem-based dial-up sites like America Online. Better yet, the I-Modem even lets you "host" a 56K x2 call, meaning your friends can call your machine and you can send them files at 56K—or you can serve as one badass Quake head-to-head connection.

Of course, to make ISDN happen, you need an ISDN line installed. Rates vary, but it's usually about $100 for installation and $30 per month for access. You can find a single-channel (64K) ISDN Internet service for the standard $19.95 a month, and twice that for both channels. While that's expensive, it's important to remember that the two ISDN channels work a lot like two phone lines. For example, you can be surfing the Net on one 64K channel and get a phone, data, or fax call on the other. If you can afford to pay double the price for a 56K modem and want to invest in ISDN, the I-Modem is the best all-around option for boosting your connect speeds. (U.S. Robotics; 800-877-9876; www.USR.com; street price $370) —*David Gerding*

Hercules Stingray 128/3D

RATING: C

So you've seen the power of a 3Dfx board but still haven't purchased one yet. You say you're not sold on the whole Monster 3D–Righteous 3D pass-through setup and would rather have an all-in-one 2D/3D accelerator. Now there's a Voodoo alternative in Hercules' $299 Stingray 128/3D.

Pentium II Processor

RATING: A

Intel's new processor benchmarks twice as fast as a P200.

Conventional wisdom says that a sequel isn't as good as the original. Wrong! For proof, you need go no further than the new Pentium II. For months, Intel teased us with rumors of the chip, code-named "Klamath." It would combine the high-end Pentium Pro with the newer MMX technology. Knowing gamers would want their old 16-bit DOS and Win 95 games to hustle, Intel revved up 16-bit performance for the Pentium II, so this new chip delivers both smoking 32-bit and 16-bit performance.

One thing about the Pentium II that takes getting used to is that you never see the chip. The product comes packaged in Intel's new "processor cartridge" design, which looks a lot like a NeoGeo game cartridge and requires an entirely new motherboard design to fit into.

To get our feet wet, Intel provided a 266MHz Pentium II in a generic system with 32MB of EDO RAM, ATI's 3D Expression with PC2TV, a 3Dfx-based 3D accelerator, a 16x CD-ROM drive, and a DVD drive with an MPEG2 decoder. The hard drive was a plain old 2.1 IDE device. Even at this early stage, the Pentium II is a gamer's dream come true. When you have this much processing speed, being forced to reboot to DOS for a couple of extra processor clock ticks is a thing of the past. The benchmarks prove it: In the plain-vanilla Quake test, we cranked a standard version of Quake up to the maximum 800-by-600 and—surprise!—got playable frame rates of 23 frames per second. By comparison, a standard 200MHz MMX Pentium delivered about 7fps at the same resolution. That's roughly a 300 percent improvement.

Interestingly, 3D hardware acceleration dramatically narrowed the performance gap between the Pentium and Pentium II. The Pentium II delivered 30fps in Quake, compared to 26fps on a 200MHz MMX Pentium when both machines were equipped with a 3Dfx card. However, as more programmers incorporate Pentium II optimizations into their code, you can expect this gap to widen. Even now, the Pentium II is clearly the next must in computer gaming. (Intel; www.intel.com; street price $650–$900)

—*David Gerding*

HOW FAST IS IT?

Processor Score:	225
Video Score:	209
Hard Drive Score:	196

**PC Games* Labs uses a standard Acer 200MHz Pentium as a baseline system for comparison, with baseline benchmarks of 100 in processor, video, and hard-drive categories. Computer systems are compared using WinBench 97.

Sony CPD-220VS

RATING: B

Sony's all-in-one 17-inch monitor will cost you.

Love it or hate it, Sony's VAIO line of consumer PCs and peripherals has a strong sense of style. From the matching cabinets to the gray-purple color scheme, Sony's consumer models are nothing if not distinctive. Which brings us to the $899 CPD-220VS 17-inch monitor (16-inch viewable) with integrated speakers and subwoofer.

Except for newbie consumers fresh to PCs, the reality of built-in monitor speakers has not lived up to the potential of the concept. For the same money, you can usually do better with Altec Lansing or Yamaha products. Although such a bias should have lowered my opinion of the 220VS, this monitor has virtues that Sony never intended.

By themselves, the two 3.5-watt speakers and 10-watt subwoofer lack bass and provide an insubstantial game audio experience. But added to an already existing Altec ACS-55 system that's heavy on bass and rumble, the Sony provides a welcome high end. Then there's the swivel base. Since the 220VS sits on top of the subwoofer housing, it's up higher than most competing 17-inch monitors—a nice feature, given that more monitors are sitting on desks these days, rather than on computers. Lastly, the 220VS comes standard with a USB pass-through port that will be very handy for the USB audio processors and input devices we ought to be seeing soon.

Oh, and the 220VS provides one of the flattest, crispest, most beautiful displays you'll ever play a game on, thanks to Sony's new graphic picture enhancement technology. Had the street price been less than $899, the 220VS would have rated higher. (Sony Electronics; 800-476-6972; www.sony.com/pc; street price $899)

—George T. Chronis

Killer video is what the Stingray delivers.

I'll begin by saying that although I'm happily enjoying everything 3Dfx games have to offer, I didn't get to this point easily. This card was installed in two other PCs in our offices before it was dropped on my unsuspecting lap. My comrades had experienced varying degrees of general protection faults, crashes, problems getting drivers to work, and headaches all around. Surprisingly, I didn't encounter the same difficulties. Coincidentally, however, my beloved KDS monitor (see *PC Games*, July/August 1997) winked out and died a quick and smoky death not long after I plugged it into the Stingray.

Since I hooked up a new monitor, the card has been running great and hasn't caused any problems...yet. In fact, thanks to the Stingray's 6MB of EDO DRAM, all my games are screaming—3Dfx-enhanced or not! Quake is stunning, Formula 1 is pure bliss, and MDK...whoa!

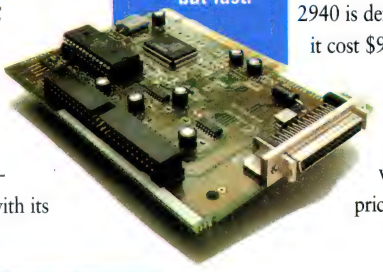
Conclusion: The Hercules is one badass mamma jamma, should the blessed thing look kindly upon your hardware. Be warned, though: The Stingray may just as easily cut a swath through your system like a Klingon in a Bat'telh tournament. We'd rate this card higher if we could recommend it without a nagging sense of uncertainty and risk. As it is, it adds new meaning to the term "killer accelerator." (Hercules; 510-623-6030; www.hercules.com; street price $299)

—Joe McCloud

Adaptec AHA-2940 Ultra

RATING: B

SCSI controllers are expensive but fast.



To SCSI, or not to SCSI? For *PC Games*, it was no longer a hypothetical option, but a hard reality. We had a 15x Toshiba SCSI CD-ROM drive to review and not one PC with a SCSI controller. Adaptec filled our need with its AHA-2940 Ultra PCI SCSI card.

There are much cheaper SCSI controllers on the market, especially the ISA-bus units that are usually sold with Iomega Zip drives, but the 2940 supports everything from SCSI-1, SCSI-2, and SCSI-3 to UltraWide SCSI hardware. It's fast, too—transferring data as quickly as 20MB per second in UltraSCSI.

In concert with a fast Hewlett Packard SCSI 2.1GB hard drive borrowed from a Power Mac, the 2940 was painless to install into a P166 MMX workhorse, and was a breeze to configure. Working with SCSI instead of the original IDE 10x CD-ROM drive, and with a 1.2GB Western Digital hard disk, game installations seemed swifter, and transitions between gameplay and cut-scenes seemed smoother.

Unfortunately, this kind of data speed will cost you—in the range of $195 on the street, as opposed to the $45 that most basic IDE controllers run. Because SCSI hardware is still more expensive than the IDE competition, the extra cost added to the 2940 is definitely a hurdle. Had it cost $99 instead of $195, the AHA Ultra would have gotten an "A" rating. (Adaptec; 800-442-7274; www.adaptec.com; street price $195)

—George T. Chronis

Solid 2D performance and a great game bundle make the Nitro 3D a good choice.

STB Nitro 3D

RATING: B-

With all the different product offerings on the market, things sure can be confusing if you're looking to buy a decent 3D card. Odds are that if you've got an older machine—such as a low-end Pentium—a stable card that delivers a good 2D/3D combination is a good way to go.

Enter the Nitro 3D, which delivers solid 2D performance with acceptable 3D power. STB also has a good ace up its sleeve with the Nitro—brand recognition and a reputation for delivering stable products, which can be a comfort when you're looking at shelves groaning with cards from makers you may have never heard of.

Add to that an attractive price point of $149 and an excellent bundle of Activision games—HyperBlade, Interstate '76, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, and Spycraft—and you've got a compelling package. (Only HyperBlade supports 3D hardware acceleration. However, Activision is working on 3D patches for both Mercenaries and I-76, and those should be out soon.)

The Nitro 3D, based on the recently updated S3 ViRGE/GX chipset, comes with 4MB of EDO DRAM and delivers decent 3D performance. For example, MDK's straight Win 95 CPU/video benchmark delivered a 50 on a Pentium 120, which is right where it should be—the base score is 44 for a P90 and 65 for a P166. With D3D enabled, the benchmark jumped to 82, soaring ahead of the P166. Not bad. The Nitro's raw 3D WinBench score clocked in at 23.5.

That said, the Nitro is a good safe choice if you're looking for stability in a 2D/3D card and a quality software bundle for a reasonable price. If you want the absolute best in 3D performance, you should check out Rendition and 3Dfx cards. (STB Systems; 972-234-8750; www.stb.com; street price $149) *—Steve Klett*

Ultimate 3D 644

RATING: C+

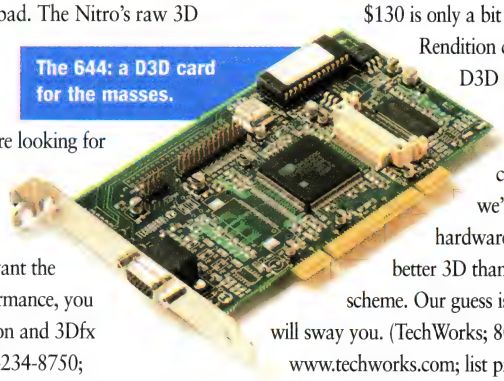
Choices, choices. What 3D video accelerator card to put in your PC? A worthy all-in-one Direct3D card is TechWorks' Ultimate 3D 644. If you're playing games that are strictly Direct3D-optimized, the Ultimate 3D isn't a bad bet.

On its own merits, this is a nice card, with 4MB of onboard Rambus graphics memory (the 642 has 2MB of onboard memory, the 646 6MB, and the 648 8MB). The PCI-based Ultimate 3D was a snap to install and get going, with no "Plug and Pray" problems. A 64-bit Cirrus Logic microprocessor means zippy performance, and the D3D games we tried out—particularly HyperBlade—gained a noticeable graphics boost with no drop in play speed.

But when we tried installing the card on a machine with the ATI Mach64 on the motherboard, we discovered a sudden inability to boot DOS-based games such as Duke Nukem 3D. On top of that, finding upgraded drivers was difficult, even though TechWorks was helpful about trying to steer us to them. Such conflicts aren't uncommon, but with so many consumer PCs being sold with graphics cards built into the motherboard, it's a problem many users are likely to encounter.

The Ultimate 3D is a likable product, especially at $130 for the 644. But you're banking on Microsoft getting D3D right. Unfortunately for TechWorks, $130 is only a bit less expensive than a Rendition card, which has both D3D support and many games being written specifically to its chipset. From what we've seen, such direct hardware support delivers better 3D than D3D's software scheme. Our guess is that this distinction will sway you. (TechWorks; 800-688-7466; www.techworks.com; list price $130)

—Don St. John



The 644: a D3D card for the masses.

Yamaha's System 45 rates well with Altec's best.

Yamaha System 45

RATING: B+

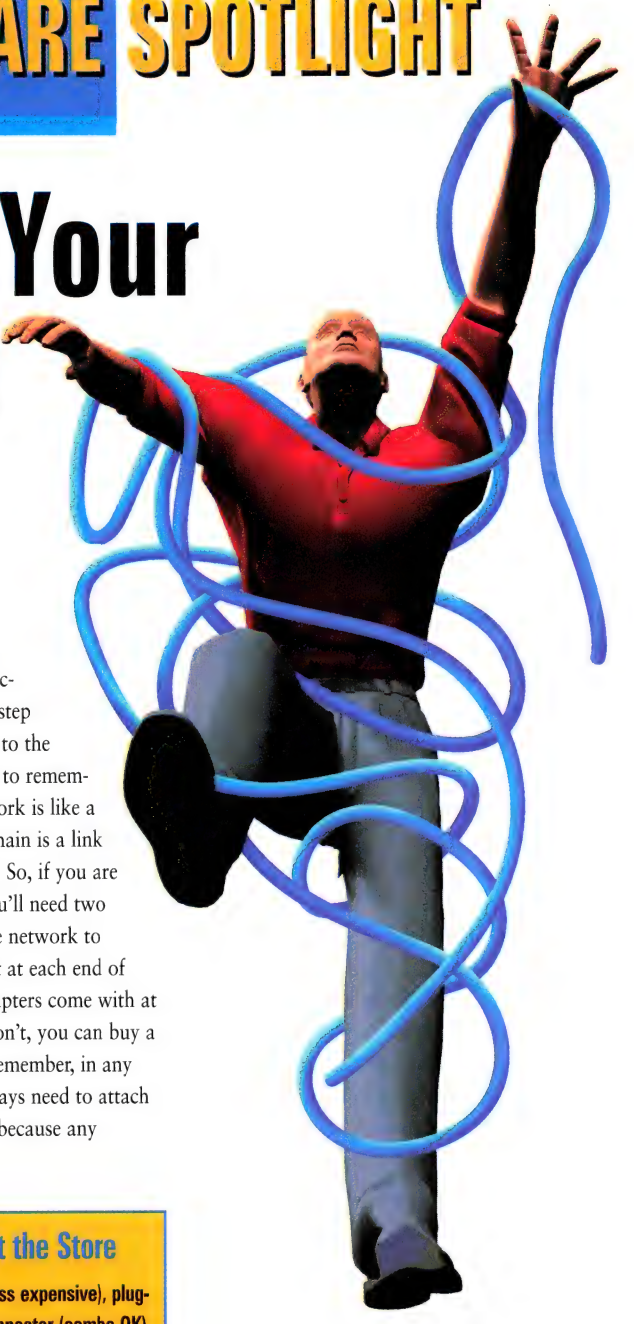
Yamaha has a reputation in the gaming community for producing speaker systems that offer high-quality sound reproduction. The YST-M10 speaker set has been one of the more popular setups, with a combination of affordability and excellent sound. This latest speaker set incorporates the YST-M15 speakers along with the MSW10 subwoofer. These speakers supply an acceptable 10-watts-per-channel output and produce a crisp sound that is OK on their own. However, nothing beats the deep, thumping bassline offered when the subwoofer's switched on.

Using Yamaha's Active Servo Processing technology, the MSW10 offers 25 watts of excellent bass that not only brings the soundtracks and sound effects of most games alive, but can also boost your favorite audio CDs when hooked up to a stereo system. But a bizarre tendency to power down during certain games is irritating, and the fact that it's hugely noticeable when the power dips out is testimony to the great difference the deep bass makes to the playing experience.

Hooked up to a quality sound card such as the AWE32, a speaker package such as this could lend a real immersive impact to your gaming experiences. (Yamaha; 800-823-6414; www.yamaha.com; street price $199.95)

—Rob Smith

How to Set Up Your Own Game LAN



By David Gerding

Tired of lag? Tired of skipping off ledges into lava on DM4? If you had a home local area network (LAN), you wouldn't have to worry about phone lines, ISP glitches, or connect fees. More importantly, there's no getting your ass kicked at Quake by some 10-year-old from Kankakee, Illinois. You play with your friends, your neighbors...people you can beat! All you need are two or more machines, Windows 95, some hardware, and some basic knowledge. And you can have it all without going broke.

Step One: Network Interface Cards

Each PC on your network will require an Ethernet-compatible network card—the board that handles network communications. Remember, a 10-megabit-per-second network connection is almost a hundred times faster than a serial-port connection. Don't listen to salespeople who try to sell you the latest 100-megabit technology or PCI-based adapters. You won't see a discernible difference in Quake between a 100-megabit network card and a 10-megabit card. Why pay for bandwidth you don't need?

You'll want a plug-and-play-compatible board, which makes installation a snap. Products from 3Com and Intel are good, but less expensive products from companies like Linksys do the same job. You can often find older network cards like these in your computer store's bargain bin for as little as $25 apiece for non-plug-and-play cards and $40 for plug-and-play cards. It's important that you choose network cards that have BNC cabling connectors. These let you set up peer-to-peer networks, saving you money because you don't have to buy extra network hardware. Make sure you get an accurate measure of the distance the cable needs to run. Cables can cost about $20, and on a peer-to-peer network, you can put as much as 100 feet of cable between machines.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

Step Two: Cabling

After powering down your systems and installing the NICs according to the manufacturer's instructions, your next step is to connect the BNC cabling to the adapters. The important thing to remember is that a peer-to-peer network is like a chain. Each computer in the chain is a link attached to the next computer. So, if you are connecting three machines, you'll need two cables. The trick is that for the network to work, you need to terminate it at each end of the chain. Make sure your adapters come with at least one terminator; if they don't, you can buy a pair for a couple of dollars. Remember, in any peer-to-peer network, you always need to attach terminators to two machines, because any "chain" has two ends.

What to Ask For at the Store

- **Ethernet NIC (ISA-based if less expensive), plug-and-play-compatible BNC connector (combo OK)**
- **BNC cables for connecting machines, one per pair of connections (e.g., three machines, two cables)**

Step Three: Software Configuration

With plug-and-play adapters, most NICs will install and configure quite easily in Win 95. Games speak to each other over your network hardware via standard protocols, the "rule books" for how computers communicate. After installing the hardware and the included software, make sure the following protocols are installed by checking the Networking applet in Control Panel: IPX, NetBEUI, and NetBIOS. These three will let you play almost every networked game out there, and there should be a copy of each in the protocol list bound to your network adapter (for example, "IPX/SPX Compatible Protocol -> PCI Ethernet DEC Chip 21041 Adapter"). Since Win 95 is providing the network support, you may need to run DOS games under Windows to get it.

Step Four: Game ON!

Reboot and enjoy. The vast majority of games use IPX, so starting a network game is as easy as choosing the multiplayer option and selecting IPX as the communication type. The game will take over, automatically locating the other players' machines and starting the game.

continued on page 160

behind the Falcon Mach V, which is tweaked. Against the Micron Millennia MXE, the *PC Games* home-built Pentium was only five points behind. But where our ATX really shone was in video performance. The Diamond Stealth Pro pulled a video score of 233, compared to 180 for the Falcon and 156 for the Micron, both of which are equipped with the earlier Stealth 3D 2000. The Sony, using a built-in ATI Rage II 3D, scored a respectable 144.

How much would this DIY system cost you? Around $1,100 less than you'd pay for the IDE version of the Falcon. So if you feel up to the challenge, you can build a great game machine for less money.

Rating: A-

The Bill

Intel TC430HX Motherboard	$130
Intel 200MHz MMX CPU	$500
ATX Computer Case	$120
Maxtor 85120A 5.1GB IDE Hard Drive	$475
Toshiba XM-5702 12x CD-ROM Drive	$150
Diamond Stealth 3D 2000 Pro	$175
Diamond Monster 3D	$180
Creative AWE64	$170
Altec Lansing ACS-55 Speaker System	$175
SIIG PCI CN0012 LAN Card	$45
Microsoft Mouse	$40
1.44MB Microdiskette Drive	$20
Keyboard	$20
TOTAL	$2,200

Diamond Monster Sound 3D

RATING: A

After months of publicity and idle speculation, 3D audio is no longer vaporware. Aureal Semiconductor's PCI-based audio technology works, and Diamond has used that technology well in its Monster Sound 3D card.

As with all new hardware categories, you really can't take full advantage of the Monster Sound today. Existing games must be adapted to use true positional 3D audio channels. And to fully benefit from what this card has to offer, games need to be written with Aureal's A3D API in mind. LucasArts, one of the early champions of A3D, has enhanced Outlaws—which already has an excellent soundtrack and great sound effects—to work with the Monster Sound. But Jedi Knight, designed to exploit A3D, will be the first full test of what 3D audio can do.

3D audio is vaporware no more.

Despite the fact that LucasArts wasn't ready to cut loose a copy of Jedi by press time, it's already obvious that a Monster Sound card is worth the investment. Using Outlaws as an example, the A3D version that ships with the Monster Sound delivers a fuller, more distinctive bass and sharper highs. You also get a better sense of surround-sound separation and directional movement of music and effects. Even Duke 3D, which is not A3D-enhanced, gets an added sense of sound-source position. Move Duke left or right near a sound source, and your position in relation to the sound shifts as well.

With improvements such as these, Jedi's audio impact should be stunning. Bottom line: The Monster Sound card is a keeper, and the future is looking bright. Aureal says that more than 70 games in development today are being written to exploit A3D, and that we'll probably see 20 A3D-enhanced games on the shelf by the end of summer. This package is worth the $199.

One thing to remember, though, is that Monster Sound 3D is a Windows 95 add-on technology—not a DOS-compatible format. For DOS, you're going to need to hold on to your existing Sound Blaster card. But like a Monster 3D Voodoo accelerator, Monster Sound 3D is a PCI audio pass-through design that works with your existing sound card. So you don't have to throw away your investment in that ISA AWE32 or AWE64 card. As we discovered with Duke, play the DOS game via a DOS window in Win 95, and you still get some distinct audio enhancements, thanks to the Monster Sound card. (Diamond Multimedia; 800-727-8772; www.diamondmm.com; street price $199) —*George T. Chronis*

HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games*' running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

CATEGORY	PRODUCT	DETAILS	OUR RATING
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Optiquest V775 17-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $600	A
CD-ROM drive	XM-5702 12x	Toshiba; 714-457-0777; approx. $120	B+
Sound card	AWE64	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $129	A
Speakers	ACS55 Power Gaming System	Altec Lansing; 800-258-3288; approx. $150	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 336i SP	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $125	A
Graphics card	Stealth 3D 2000 Pro	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $160	A
Key add-on	Monster 3D Monster Sound 3D	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $180 800-727-8772; approx. $199	A

TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

The sinister secrets of modem speeds and batch filing

By Patrick Marshall

Q I recently bought a U.S. Robotics 33.6 Sportster modem. When I dial, it says "Connected at 26,400." I figured it was supposed to say that, but when I went to my friend's house, I found that his 28.8 modem says "Connected at 26,400," too. That seemed weird, so I tried downloading something using both modems, and they took about the same amount of time. Does this mean I paid extra money for nothing?

Pete Nguyen
Sacramento, CA

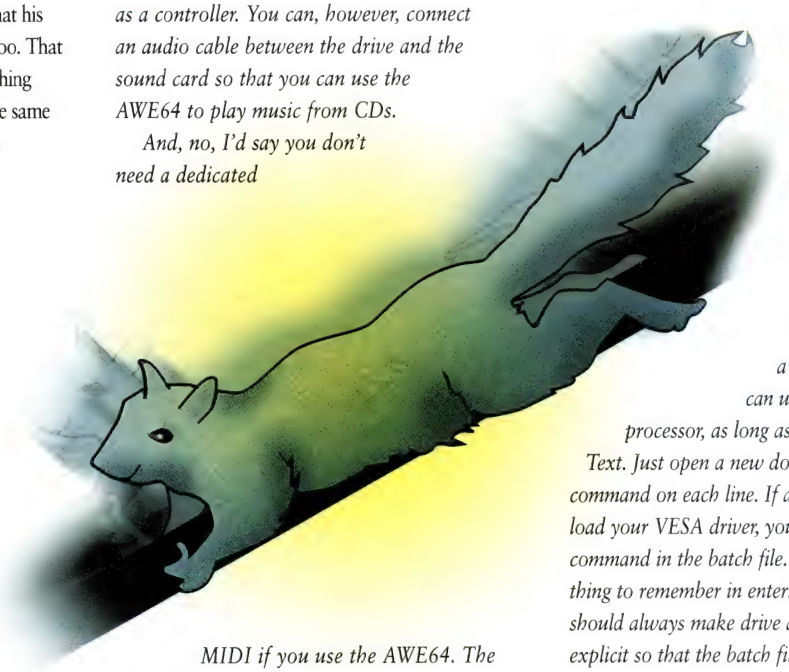
A *Theoretically, analog modems should be able to sustain a maximum transfer rate of about 35,000 bps over standard telephone lines. But that's just in theory. In fact, there are lots of things that make it impossible to transfer data at higher speeds: snow, squirrels shaking the telephone line, sunspots—dozens of factors that can create noise on the line. Fact is, when your modem connects to another modem, it negotiates the connection at the highest possible speed. If the telephone line has lots of noise on it, even a modem capable of transmission at 33,600 bps may actually only be able to negotiate a connection at 26,400, 24,000, or even 14,400 bps. If the conditions are good enough to support 33,600 bps transmissions, that's what you'll get. If they degrade, the modem will slow down. I've rarely seen my own 33.6 modem connect at a speed higher than 28,800 bps.*

Q For my next PC, I'm planning to get a Plextor 12x SCSI-2 CD drive and an Adaptec 2940 UW SCSI controller, as well as a Creative Labs' Sound Blaster AWE64 PnP Gold. As the AWE64 will be inserted in an ISA slot, please confirm that the card has an appropriate cable-interface connection to the SCSI CD drive or the SCSI controller. Also, to get maximum MIDI playback from games and multimedia, will I still need a dedicated MIDI card, even when using the 4MB version of the AWE64?

Sherif Kotb
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

A *The AWE64 is an ISA card, as you note. Therefore, you wouldn't connect a SCSI CD drive directly to the AWE64 card as a controller. You can, however, connect an audio cable between the drive and the sound card so that you can use the AWE64 to play music from CDs.*

And, no, I'd say you don't need a dedicated MIDI if you use the AWE64. The AWE64 supports 64 musical instrument voices, twice as many as most MIDI cards, so you can expect a fuller, more realistic sound when the game or multimedia CD is designed to take advantage of it.



Actually, only 32 of the AWE64's voices originate from hardware on the card; an additional 32 are provided by a software synthesizer. The software synthesizer uses more of your computer's CPU time, but in combination with the hardware synthesizer, it provides a richer sound than a 32-voice MIDI device. Of course, no matter how many voices your card has, the quality of the sound depends to a large extent on the algorithm used for interpreting sounds electronically, and I've found the AWE64 to be quite good in this respect. The AWE64 uses wavetables—recordings of actual sounds—to generate output, making it more realistic.

Q Please try not to laugh at this question, but how do you make a batch file? I'm trying to write a batch file for Duke Nukem 3D, so that when I want to play the game with my VESA driver, I won't have to go into my video directory and type "VVESA" every time.

Chris Gallagher
Rochester, NY

A *The only silly questions are ones to which you already know the answer. Fortunately, it's fairly easy to create a batch file. First, you can use your favorite word processor, as long as you save the file as Text. Just open a new document and enter one command on each line. If all you want to do is load your VESA driver, you'll only have a single command in the batch file. There is, however, one thing to remember in entering that command: You should always make drive and directory references explicit so that the batch file will work regardless of the directory it's located in.*

Let's assume, as you have indicated, that the name of your VESA driver is VVESA.COM. If you simply put VVESA.COM on a line, and the batch file isn't in the same directory as the VESA file, your computer won't know where to find it. Thus, if VVESA.COM is stored in a VESA directory on your C drive, enter:

c:\VESA\VVESA.COM

When you've entered all the commands you want in the batch file, name the file with a .BAT extension. I generally store all batch files in the root directory of my C drive, which is always in the system path. That way, I can execute the batch file from any directory I might be in.

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FACE-OFF

Who Gives a Wang?

Snipe | *Blade*

Are some game designers going too far with their story material? Has a harmful reliance on stereotypes been mistaken for interesting gameplay? After countless hours with the new Shadow Warrior demo, Snipe has come out of his dank corner in visible **bold** to question whether the game's depiction of Asians is acceptable. No stranger to freedom of expression, Blade stands up for the sanctity of humor in *italics*.

Before you label me a politically correct fascist—for I am far from it—stop and think hard about this question: Does the humor in Shadow Warrior come from belittling Asians as a race? If the answer is yes, I have a problem with the game.

In a simple word, no. The humor in Shadow Warrior is of the cartoon variety seen on TV, film, and computer games—admittedly silly and unsophisticated, but that's the point. The fact that the character is Asian is purely a gameplay element to allow the use of certain weaponry and offer a different l ook to the game. Therefore, no problem.

For some, Lo Wang is just fine the way he is.

For others, Shadow Warrior is a cheap shot at Asians.

Okay, let's entertain the cartoon theory. Why are cartoon characters based on animals? U-n-i-v-e-r-s-a-l-i-t-y. Creating a stereotypical bunny or duck offends no human. But give that animal a human cultural or ethnic stereotype, and you wade into trouble. Check out early Betty Boop cartoons from the 1920s, and you'll be shocked at some of the animal sidekicks that exhibit negative stereotypes of black Americans. Speedy Gonzales is not a silly and unsophisticated mouse, he's a silly and unsophisticated Mexican. On the contrary, Elmer Fudd is a silly and unsophisticated hunter, and Yosemite Sam is a silly and unsophisticated '49er—character types, not racial or ethnic stereotypes. But Lo Wang is a silly and unsophisticated Asian. There's a difference.

You're looking too hard for something to be worried about. Were all the muscle-bound Arnold types up in arms over the cartoon depiction of Duke Nukem? No. Why? To do so would be looking far too hard for non-problems and overlooking ones that really exist and really cause offense. Lo Wang is a silly and unsophisticated Asian. He's also a hero (saving the world) and an expert in the typically Asian pursuit of martial arts. He's also a computer-game character.

No, I simply recognize when something obvious, as in "typically Asian," assaults my senses. Historical fact: Cultures and races on top use media to reinforce their "superiority" over cultures and races that are not so lucky. Humor is used to portray someone's culture as being fumbling and moronic, and make it the butt of deprecating jokes. Having an Asian hero like Bruce Lee saving the world is cool, but I guarantee you that Bruce Lee would never say "I'm bumping into walls now" in a half-wit manner.

First, it's not at all obvious. I was stunned when you first brought up the fact that this could be bothersome. Lo Wang is Asian because that allowed gameplay styles and elements to be introduced—shurikens, the katana, and so on. It also allowed for Asian-style architecture and lent some originality to a labored format. Who cares if he's a bit bungling? You're being far too sensitive. There have been plenty of white bungling characters in games, and I wasn't offended; I didn't even notice. Dragging this level of PC onto the PC is going to stop games from being fun.

Sorry, my imperial friend, but you're missing the point entirely. Your justification for the choice of an Asian motif is irrelevant. The point is not that Lo Wang is Asian; the point is how Lo Wang is portrayed as an Asian.

So Lo Wang follows a popular stereotype. So do many games and many forms of media. This isn't to suggest that it's right, just that it isn't offensive. If people can't laugh at themselves, we should all pack up and go home, and if we're looking for offense in an off-the-cuff game, then it really is a sad state of affairs. Shadow Warrior is pretty cool, Lo Wang is fairly handy—who cares whether there's a gag or two thrown in? If Shadow Warrior causes anyone offense, I'll argue 'til I'm blue in the face that they're being too touchy.

Aha! You admit that Lo Wang "follows a popular stereotype." I'll take that as a win. We can work on your sensitivity training later.

But the argument was that the portrayal could be bothersome, which you don't prove and I don't accept. End of story.

In a previous career, Snipe was assigned the job of weeding out racist Warner Bros. World War II propaganda cartoons from university screenings.

By contrast, Blade was once employed by the British government to produce "humorous" political cartoons disparaging Argentines during the Falklands War.

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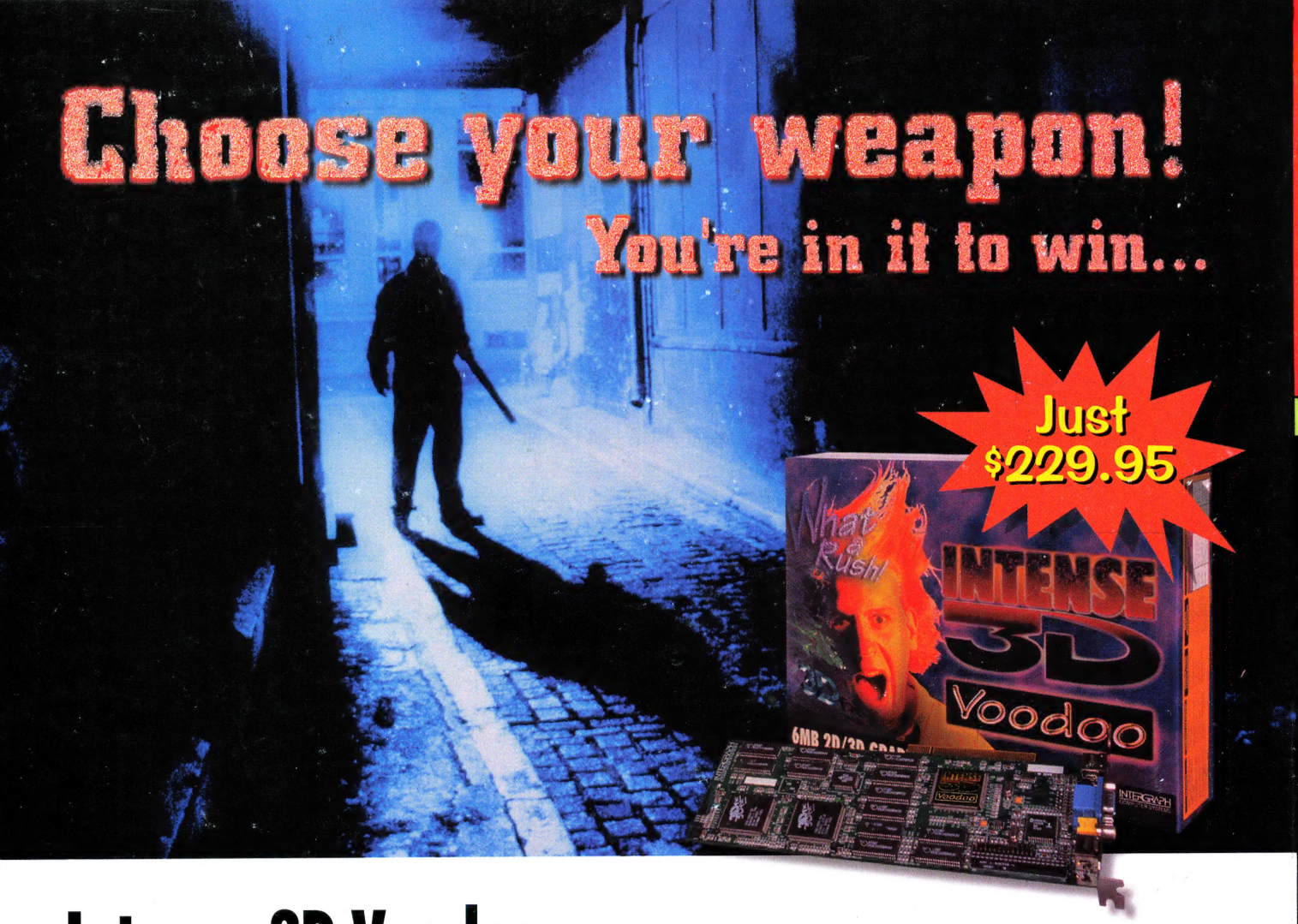

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